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**ITALIAN  
SILHOUETTES**



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# ITALIAN SILHOUETTES

BY  
RUTH SHEPARD PHELPS



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TO  
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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## INTRODUCTION

Moderns, we should call them—the men and women portrayed in these essays. Most of them are of to-day, the others are of recent yesterdays. And yet modernness, in Italy, is not really a matter of the generations. For modernness implies an eager, creative delight in life, aware of all the day's new gifts, and of the moment's preciousness—and such delight is perennially Italian. It illumines the Medicean Renaissance; it is resonant in Dante.

But modernness alone sufficeth not, for vitality of the spirit wells only from deep springs. And the springs of Italian life are profoundly deep. Past is ever present in the Italian landscape. Roman experience persists in thought, and the ages since enrich the cherished and inevitable heritage.

Thus in Italy youth and age forever coexist in tempered unity. Storied tradition gives to gay adventure an ennobling wisdom; creative eagerness transmutes possession into glowing power.

Even so Italy is intense in local life, and yet broad in vision. Italy is a land divided—finely traced with rivers, deeply modelled with mountain slopes and valleys, bravely outlined with bays and promontories, generously bestarred with islands—and the dwellers in

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each bounded region share in a compelling native fellowship. Yet, as from a certain summit in the Casentino you may see, if you turn to the West, the Tyrrhenian, and if you turn to the East, the Adriatic, so from her peninsular dominance the thought of Italy ranges over land and sea. Dante is conscious of the total lights and shadows of the whole round earth, and summons the whole populace of human friends into a single loyalty.

It is, I think, for reasons such as these that the influence of Italy in the life of the spirit transcends the Alps and the centuries.

So in the Italian writers brought to your fuller knowledge in this book you may with assurance seek young zest and olden counsel, the *campanile* and the mountain-top.

Very unlike they are, yet clearly and essentially they are sons and daughters of the same family. *Tutti differenti*, says the Milanese watchman, with a gleam of pride, as he leads you among the marvellously differentiated spires upon the roof of the cathedral. Each is indeed unique; but they rise together of the same marble, in the same Italian sunlight.

ERNEST H. WILKINS.

## GIOSUÈ CARDUCCI

### I

IT is a commonplace to say that the nations of the North have seen in Italy from the first the home of romance, the pleasure-place of the imagination. And they have always delighted to heighten her effects. From Chaucer to Walter Pater she has ever been the land of mystery and tragedy, of soft lascivious manners and gorgeous crimes, of a deep magical melancholy which has laid a spell upon the Northern mind—a spell, however, which that mind itself and its tastes have created. The deep racial differences have fascinated the Teutonic imagination, which in turn has exaggerated them; and they have done for the Italian temperament in our fancy what the Tuscan cypress does for the grave Italian landscape, given it that touch of strangeness added to beauty which for Pater's mind constituted the romantic. But to think thus of Italy is to deal in a kind of pathetic fallacy. Italy is not romantic in her own view; in her own view she is classic, wholly and unescapably. Her mystic landscape is the same that Virgil and Horace celebrated without a hint of mysticism; Pliny had a villa on Lake Como, Catullus one at Garda; everywhere the antique world underlies the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

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Italy was classic before ever romanticism was invented, and classic she remains.

Not that the Italians are the Romans, or think they are. They went through the Middle Ages with the rest of Europe, though with a difference. But their classical heritage is in their memories. Even the greatest mediæval and Christian poem in the world betrays the classic instinct in its magnificent framework, its structure and its pattern. Petrarch's sonnets are romantic in their personal note of self-revelation; but his hope of fame, we must remember, he based upon Latin works executed as far as he knew how in the classic spirit, and it would have seemed to him an irony that his "Song-Book," a mere lover's diary, should be the thing of his to take the fancy of a romanticizing posterity. With the Renaissance came the complete recovery of Italy's inheritance from antiquity, and a recognition of the true lineage of native inspiration; and Italian literature—even when romantic in subject, as in Ariosto and Tasso—has been classic in method ever since.

So the Romantic Movement was never at home on Italian soil. It was but one more invasion by the barbarians. It came in by the door of political thought, with the ideas of the French Revolution, and when Italy's own conflict was over, her brief attack of the romantic fever left her. Leopardi's romantic pessimism of mood was deeply rooted in the classical tradition of form, and when Italy's other great nineteenth-century poet came to be born (in the very decade which had begun with the publication of *Hernani*), he was



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born a classic; and as we see Carducci discarding the foreign romantic wear in literature at the very moment when Italy was repudiating foreign political domination, we seem to feel that classicism—native and traditional as it is—fits as closely the new idea of unity and integrity as romanticism earlier had fitted the time of struggle.

The birth of Giosuè Carducci, which met the need of a robuster spirit in Italian poetry to match the renewal of national hope, occurred in 1835. He witnessed the whole of the struggle for independence, and lived nearly forty years under the free tricolour. When he was born, Silvio Pellico had been five years out of his Austrian prison, and Charles Albert on his throne for four; when Carducci was thirteen the first Italian army took the field against Austria, and he saw its initial successes and its speedy defeat at Custoza; a year later, a boy of fourteen, he sorrowed over the disaster of Novara. He was twenty-five when Victor Emmanuel came to the throne and Cavour to the ministry, and thirty-five when the King at last entered Rome.

His birthplace was a little village named Valdicastello in the garden of Tuscany. His father was a physician, an ardent patriot and anti-clerical, who brought the boy up to love his country and hate the Church. Besides the medical library, there was a precious collection of what Lamb would have admitted as *biblia* on the shelves of the bare little house where poetry and poverty dwelt together. This village doctor read and

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cherished his scanty library, and nourished his son upon Virgil and Horace, Dante and Tasso, and two works of history whose titles are significant—Rollin's "Rome," and Thiers's "History of the French Revolution." The perusal of Thiers and Rollin, added to conversations overheard in which the father proclaimed his own liberal principles, fired the boy with a passion for republican government, a passion which he translated into action by organizing republic after little republic with his brothers and their young companions—a republic with archons, with tribunes, with consuls, it mattered little which, he says, so long as each was inaugurated with a revolution. The revolutions were conducted with stone-throwing and debate, and after one too-violent Jacobin demonstration his father imprisoned him for some time with Manzoni's "Christian Morals" and Silvio Pellico's "Duties of Man." One cannot help tracing some of Carducci's later dislike of all moralizing, sentiment, romanticism, and Christianity, to this early incarceration in the undesired company of saints. Parental discipline likewise drew the first poetry out of him. He had three cherished pets which he delighted to fondle—an owl, a falcon, and a young wolf—but one day his father, out of patience with these singular tastes, slew the birds and gave the beast away. Carducci, like many another broken-hearted lover, assuaged his grief with song, and his first verses were those thus wrung from him by sorrow. Wordsworth's phrase comes to mind at this picture of a madcap little boy all activity and emotion. The whole future man

can be discerned here in him—the revolutionist, the inveterate decrier of Manzoni, and the poet.

There came an end to the days at Valdicastello, and he was sent first to a clerical school where he was as out of his element as might be expected, and then to the normal school in Pisa, which he felt was conducted by pedants. In spite of the scorn which he entertained for the methods of education practised upon him, he was an eager and untiring student from the first, as several of his schoolmates, who have grown up to be men of letters, testify. One of them says the boy was as economical of his time as a miser of his purse, and that as the long and frequent religious exercises irked him as so much time lost, he used to carry with him instead of his prayer-book some classic of similar binding and dimensions, and read it voraciously during the service. A poem reminiscent of these years, called “A Recollection of Schooldays,” shows us how little we can guess what is going on in small heads that bend above school-books. He recalls a day in mid-June, when, the conjugation of *amo* suddenly beginning to dance before his eyes upon the yellow page of his grammar, and the droning voice of the black-frocked priest, his teacher, to grow faint, his thoughts fly out of the window where a cherry-bough red with fruit is beckoning to him. Beyond, he can see a mountain-top and a strip of sky and a patch of the blue Ligurian sea, and hear the hum of bees and the song of birds. Then suddenly across his mind, thus occupied with growing live things, strikes the sharp thought of death, the

knowledge that he must some day lie insensible to all these outdoor solicitations while the birds go on singing, not for him. And the little boy's heart is shaken with fear.

He received his doctorate from Pisa, at the age of twenty-one, and thus describes the ordeal of his examination in literature in a letter to Giuseppe Chiarini, the friend who was to become his biographer, the "Caro Beppe" to whom many of the letters are addressed:

"Yesterday I had my examination, or rather discussed the theme in Italian literature which I had chosen, and the result was more than gratifying. From the beginning, contrary to custom, I had my audience—famous white-haired men in doctors' gowns—silent and all attention for an hour. (And I was supposed to have spoken a half-hour.) There was one, a little professor of rational philosophy, who pronounced himself awe-struck at my citations from memory!

"I could not complete my discourse, and came off ten minutes short because the Provost said to me at last, seeing there was no end to it: 'I must announce to Dr. Carducci, to my regret, that the time allotted to him by law has already been exceeded by thirty minutes,' and then rang his little bell. . . . Then came congratulations, embraces and kisses, from all the most distinguished and the least distinguished, and the whole roomful pressed around me.

"It all ended in a great lark; for in the evening, on the Lungarno, accompanied by Pelosini, Tribolati, and others, I declaimed extempore an epic poem to Father



Arno, an Etruscan deity with sea-green locks, who refused to countenance electric light, gas, or steam. Tarquin, Lars Porsena, the virgin Camilla and Turnus were in it, and went about extinguishing all the gas-jets, and unearthing ancient lamps from the sepulchre of Tarquinia and the Etruscan tombs. The hero of the piece, whose part I half sang and half declaimed, was an Etruscan vase, which broke into the shops, smashing cups, tumblers, and all such modern trash. The others laughed tremendously, as I went on chanting, now in blank verse and now in *ottava rima*, while the general public passed by in the distance, intimidated. All this I did in my dress-suit, with my best waistcoat on, and an enormous white cravat around my neck."

It is a pity that more of the letters of Carducci's later years do not exhibit him in this vein of extravagant humour; but the first volume of them to be published is largely taken up with business notes to publishers, and the hasty letters to friends are oftenest concerned with questions of literary or textual criticism.

Soon after his examination, with its triumphant issue, there came a family tragedy. His brother Dante, in a fit of melancholy, killed himself at the breakfast-table before his parents' horror-stricken eyes. His father's death followed hard upon this disaster, and on Carducci fell the support of his mother, his young brother, his cousin, and his cousin's wife. They had moved to Florence by this time, and were living in a modest house near the Porta Romana, which to-day wears a tablet. A year or so later, in 1857, appeared

the first little book of verses, entitled "Rhymes," published rather reluctantly in the single hope of eking out expenses, a hope naturally destined to disappointment. At the same time he was engaged with some other ambitious young men in founding a little society to take the field against the romanticists. They called themselves *Gli amici pedanti* ("Pedant Friends") and fought their foe chiefly on patriotic grounds, alleging romanticism to be "an irreverence done our great classical writers."

Meanwhile, in order to live, he was teaching school, first at San Miniato del Tedesco, and then, when newly married in 1859, at Pistoia. His marriage brought him children, a beautiful little son who died at the age of three, named Dante for the dead brother, and three daughters who lived to grow up. His wife seems to have left not the smallest impress on his letters or his poetry, but his little son's death and his daughter's marriage inspired beautiful poems. In 1860, when he was but twenty-five, there came a welcome bolt from the blue, his appointment to the chair of literature at Bologna, a post he continued to fill until just a few years before his death in 1907. His activities as professor were many. He edited a great many texts, besides teaching, lecturing, and writing poetry and criticism; and his personal influence was inspiring to his students. He had small patience, however, with their premature literary aspirations, and was a stern critic of their first attempts. He used to say that he was going to introduce an Education Bill, of which Article

## G I O S U È C A R D U C C I

XXXIX should read: "Any professor whose students shall be found publishing prose or verse within three years of graduation, shall be deprived of his chair; and any professor whose students shall be found publishing prose or verse while still in college, shall be beaten with rods." William Roscoe Thayer says of Carducci's professorship: "He was a scholar of the best German type, familiar with the apparatus of the philologist, a stickler for perfection in line and word and comma. Yet this was but the beginning. Since Schiller taught at Jena, no such poet had sat in a professor's chair, while Carducci was what Schiller was not, a profound and careful scholar as well." His capacity for work was enormous. He could put in eight or ten hours on end, with one off for the mental refreshment of proof-reading. During his first year at Bologna he says that he rose at three even in January, to prepare his lectures on Petrarch. Here are some sentences from a letter written that same year:

"I am studying and reading constantly, incessantly; I make no acquaintances, I go nowhere, not even to the café. I write nearly all day, and besides writing, read Latin and study Greek. In the last two weeks I have devoured the *Electra* of Sophocles and six books of Virgil, corrected the *Stanze* [a work of Politian's that he was editing], and written the commentary on fifty-six of them. You see I am at work. I don't know when I shall get back to poetry, but should like to write a poem on the monument to Leopardi, finish my ode to Liberty, write a song in *terza rima* to Rome, and an

ode to the people. But I greatly fear I shall write no more verses."

When those words were penned, the *Nuove rime* and the *Odi barbare* were still unwritten!

It is necessary to touch upon Carducci's political opinions. He had begun, as will be readily guessed, a red Republican, but as he saw the heroes of the *Risorgimento* pass and leave the stage to lesser men, he came to agree with the wise Cavour that Italy was not ripe for democratic government, and to acquiesce in a kingdom under the house of Savoy. He even served a term as senator under the new régime. His change of front, however, laid him open to misconstruction and at one time to something like persecution from his hot-headed young students at Bologna. It has been ascribed, and French critics characteristically accept this view, to his great admiration for the gracious Queen Margherita, whose long friendship for him was published when, a few years before his death, she purchased his library to preserve it from being scattered. But his sincerity and patriotism are as unquestionable as his courage—courage in the face of poverty, grief, misrepresentation. All who write of his character find the same word for it—leonine. In him we are in touch with a personality of power, with some elements of true greatness. Wayward and wilful, to be sure, hot-tempered and quick to tears, proud as Lucifer and unselfconscious as a child, a mixture of hero and *enfant terrible*, generous, laborious, and brave, he answers to the sociologist's definition of

genius, he is the eternal adolescent. He suggests, somewhat, Walter Savage Landor, so exquisitely polished an artist, yet a personality so burly, and might almost as well have sat for the caricaturing portrait of Boythorn. In friendship he was ardent and self-devoted, but whimsical. The child of village folk, in drawing-rooms he was ever unwieldy. In humour he was somewhat lacking, save in Ben Jonson's sense, and good spirits seem not to have accompanied him very far upon the highway of our life. In an early letter he describes himself as not very well fitted to live upon this globe, not so much by reason of circumstances as because of the temper of his mind. And he exhorts "Caro Beppe" somewhere: "Write, write—and forget this life, which is a vain thing." Vivacity in his letter-writing is called out only by his dislikes; he says himself: "I was ever more ready to hate evil than to love good," but the truth is rather that he enjoyed himself more in the expression of his antipathies.

Of all the anecdotes and reminiscences which it is tempting to quote, we must content ourselves with one, the chapter of recollections contributed by Annie Vivanti (Mrs. Chartres). The young poetess was his great friend and pet. No one else has such characteristic incidents to recount of him. Mrs. Chartres recalls driving over the border from Switzerland into Italy with him once, when two Germans had begged the privilege of riding in his carriage that they might have the experience of seeing Italy first in the company of her greatest poet. As they reached the line, a group of

the too-familiar beggars rose up at the side of the road to clamour for *un soldo*, which the Germans, delighted at their picturesqueness, gladly gave them. But Carducci was cut to the heart at this exhibition of his countrymen's weakness; standing up in his carriage, he thunderously commanded the unoffending Germans to descend and leave him, and forbade Annie Vivanti to speak a word, while he sat brooding in silence over his humiliation.

"This small impersonal incident," she says, "wounded him far more than any personal slight ever could. When in 1895, after he had renounced Republicanism, his students in Bologna turned against him with insults and violence, hissing him, and even in one instance striking him, he was unmoved and calm. When they cried: 'Down with Carducci!' he shook his leonine head gravely and said: 'No, never down with me! God has set me on high!' On the day after these events he came to see us in Genoa, and we were horrified to see his hand, the strong small hand which has penned some of the most beautiful poetry Italy has produced, wounded and bruised. One of his students had struck him with a large key. Carducci smiled indulgently, almost tenderly. 'They are good boys, I love them,' he said. 'They think they are in the right, so they are right.'

" 'Why did you leave them?' I asked. 'Why turn back?'

" 'My child,' he answered, 'easy it was and a joy to lead a band of eager youths to the ringing words 'Re-



public' and 'Freedom.' All young Italy followed with shouts and cheers. But should I have been worthy of their trust if, when I saw that we had struck the wrong path, I had not turned round and told them so? Indeed, it takes courage to face the sorrow and mistrust of all those young hearts. I am grieved for their grief. But they will understand one day that Italy is not ready for a republic.' "

On another occasion Carducci took his favourite to see the composer Verdi, then an old man, in his villa by the sea.

"On arrival, Carducci went out on the marble terrace overlooking the shimmering Mediterranean, and sat there without speaking a word. Verdi, calling to me, sat down at his piano and, easily as the wind blows, played rambling and beautiful music as though he were talking to me. Then he rose and stepped through the open window to the terrace, where Carducci still sat motionless staring at the sea. We sat down beside him and nobody spoke for a long time. . . . Carducci said suddenly: 'I believe in God,' and Verdi nodded his white head."

Here is an anecdote in different vein. "His hatred of all forms of adulation," Mrs. Chartres says, "was profound. '*Buon giorno, Poeta!*' exclaimed a beautiful young man at Madesimo one day, saluting him with a wide sweep of his hat. Carducci stopped and stared at the stranger. 'Poet,' he said. 'Who Poet? I am not Poet to you. To you I am Signor Carducci.' And he strode angrily on." On another occasion they were

in the street together when a ragged journalist stopped them, asking help for his sick wife and unluckily adding that it was he who had written an article in appreciation of Carducci which had appeared the week before. Carducci, in anger that anyone should think he could be won with praise, struck the man with his cane. But then sent the wife a hundred-franc note the same evening!

And here is Mrs. Chartres's personal tribute:

"Since the day of our first meeting, he has been a friend to me and mine. Carducci's friendship! No one who does not know him well can understand what that means. . . . To all the world he is a great poet, historian, scholar; and a noble man, stern, rugged, severe, uncompromising, splendid in his austere serenity. But those whose hand he has held in friendship, who have seen him day by day in his simplicity and goodness, his kindness and strength . . . those fortunate ones to whom the full purity and humility of his great soul have been revealed, speak his name with tender breath, and write of him with halting hand, as I do; with eyes, perhaps, as mine, brimming over with tears."

## II

Carducci's poetic work fills a thousand pages, a thousand pages of short poems. Not one above six pages, and those of such length few; not one narrative poem, not one long elegy or meditative work, not a closet drama; a thousand pages of lyric poetry by a poet who hated subjectivity. The "lyric cry" we think to recog-

nize in the personal note, and he is seldom personal. When he is, it is not his feelings but his opinions that he usually expresses. Love and *Weltschmerz*, the burden of most lyric poetry, are absent. We might say, to be sure, that to express prejudices and predilections is to strike as intimate a note as to sing of passion and despair, yet even this so much drier and less exuberant kind of personal expression is lacking in his latest, greatest volume.

The first two hundred and fifty pages of the collected poems contain the *Juvenilia*, poems written between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. They are the verses of an angry young man, angry with almost equal heat against the enemies of Italy, bad poetry, his own base and cowardly generation—"vile little Christianizing century," as he calls it—and Alessandro Manzoni. His lifelong rage against that gentle and revered poet, already full of years and honours by the time Carducci was grown, has something droll in its exaggeration. Carducci used Manzoni's name to conjure up a whole set of detested associations, very much as the romantics were accustomed to revile classicism, artificiality, and the eighteenth century under the name of Pope; though it is only fair to say that Carducci the critic did larger justice to Manzoni and the whole Romantic Movement in Italy than did the poet or the letter-writer; but, as a French critic aptly puts it: "In his prose he says what he knows, in his poetry what he thinks."

In the verses of this young man, moreover, there are almost no love poems, and he repents of only two

or three as heartily as did Petrarch of his whole "Song-Book." His repentance seems to have been lifelong. There is hardly a love poem in the whole collection. We can find one or two to shadowy ladies with classical names—Lydia or Lalage—but only one to a real woman, the lovely "Idyl of the Maremma." This celebrates *bionda Maria*, strong and beautiful daughter of the fields, beloved in his youth; it is somewhat in the temper of Landor's "Fiesolan Idyl," and so beautiful that we can only wish there were more.

The next twenty years of professorship at Bologna, during which he wrote so many lectures and volumes of criticism, are yet the most fruitful of poetry. In the volumes known as *Levia Gravia* and "Iambs and Epodes," the poems are mostly occasional tributes to friendship or comment upon political events, since in Italy, more than elsewhere in Europe, poetry has always been a friend to politics. They include the celebrated "Hymn to Satan," published in 1865, which called such a storm about his ears; the young secessionists of letters applauded, while the clergy shuddered, and his name immediately became common property from one end to the other of the peninsula.

The "New Rhymes" (*Nuove rime*) are scattered along over these same years between twenty-five and fifty. The only romantic influence Carducci ever underwent was Heine's, and here in the *Nuove rime* is his one small oblation to the romantic spirit of his time. Besides several translations from Heine and other German ballad-writers, there are a precious scant

half-dozen of purely personal lyrics. Here are the heart-breaking songs over the little son so long dead, and a few upon the tedium and heaviness of life; here are the "Idyl of the Maremma" and the "Remembrance of Schooldays." These poems, with their homelike note of northern melancholy, together with many of the "Barbaric Odes"—descriptive and historical, divorced from his earlier didacticism—these are the ones, I dare be sure, that the English reader will oftenest go back to.

The *Odi barbare* are his greatest work. They are unrhymed, and written in the classic metres of the Latin poets—alcaics, sapphics, hexameters—and called barbaric, not because their novelty of form owes anything to the northern barbarian, but because they would have sounded so to Virgil and Horace. The Italians are an exceedingly sensitive literary people by whom all novelty in language or form is speedily punished, so the *Odi barbare* provoked a tempest which kept their author on the defensive for years. It passed in time, leaving the odes securely placed in Italian literature, which they are now recognized to have greatly enriched. Their unrhymed melody the foreigner probably never fully appreciates, but he can see that in them Carducci has attained his ideal of a pure objective beauty, expressed, as all Italian critics are now prompt to tell us, with a kind of helpless perfection of style.

This volume is full of beauty and full of ideas, but few individual poems can be conceded to contain both. His principal ideas are three: first, patriotism, with a

passionate love of liberty and democracy; second, an aversion to romanticism and all its works; third, a dislike of Christianity. He was a pagan, a classicist, and a democrat. It may be objected that these things—patriotism, love, aversion, dislike—are feelings, not ideas. We can only say that in Carducci his feelings were his ideas, and if an idea which is a feeling is best described as a prejudice, it could be no one's intention to exonerate Carducci from that. He was prejudiced; but, at any rate, his ideas, feelings, prejudices, whatever we may agree to call them, were compelling in him. They had reality, and coloured all his work. The belief in democracy seems a singular third with the other two; for Christianity is democratic, yet he is anti-Christian, romanticism is democratic, yet Carducci was a classicist. This antagonism was reconciled by his national feeling. It was part of his patriotism to repulse foreign ideas as well as foreign troops; he longed to see Italy develop and unify from within, intellectually as well as politically. If he had been reminded that democracy also was a foreign idea, born of the French Revolution and the English constitution, he would have pointed backward to the Roman Republic and the free Italian communes of the Middle Ages. For the sense of continuity was strong in him, the line of tradition in his imagination ran unbroken from Cincinnatus to Garibaldi; that event from which the Western world reckons forward and backward did not divide the stream of history for him.

But Christianity and romanticism were both clearly



foreign. And as we have seen him and his young pedant friends combating romanticism as an irreverence done the great Italian classics, so it is perhaps not too fanciful to conceive him as rejecting Christianity partly as an irreverence to the local pagan divinities, whom, if he could not believe in, he loved and understood. "The other divinities perish," he says in a poem entitled "Hellenic Spring"; "the gods of Greece have known no setting." He seems to have been, like John Stuart Mill, naturally non-Christian, without the pain of severing an allegiance he had never sworn. *Anima naturaliter pagana*. "Nature he loved, and next to Nature, Art."

But Carducci's quarrel with Christianity and romanticism was not only because they were foreign; to his mind both were sentimental, sickly. And the foreign and the morbid made a combination in the highest degree obnoxious to him. His corrective for them was Nature and Reason, the classic spirit. There are two poems of his which illustrate his attitude towards Christianity better than any discussion can, "The Springs of Clitumnus" and the "Hymn to Satan." "The Springs of Clitumnus" shows his opposition to Christian asceticism and glorification of sorrow, and his sense that Christianity has been an unwelcome interruption from without, an obstacle in the path of man's natural development, while the "Hymn to Satan" provides the corrective. This demoniac canticle, or what seemed such to churchly imaginations, celebrates a divinity that has nothing in common either with Milton's disdainful hero or with the

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Prince of Darkness of Christian theology, but is a kind of compound of Phœbus Apollo and the great god Pan, with a touch of Prometheus.

On the Romantic Movement Carducci looked with vision equally astigmatic. Just as he saw in Christianity not a spiritual discipline and an attitude towards life, but merely clericalism and asceticism, so he conceived of romanticism as just *Weltschmerz* and sentimentality. Of all the definitions which it has vexed the critics to make, Goethe's must have pleased him best: "Classicism is health, romanticism a disease." "After all," to quote his own words, "when all is said, Leopardi sends folk to the hospital, Manzoni to the confessional, and Byron to the galleys." Carducci missed entirely that aspect of romanticism which was inspired by the liberating spirit, the spirit of revolt (the very spirit, in fact, of his Satan), and for this reason: Romanticism he conceived as the cult of the Middle Ages, and the Middle Ages as they affected the North of Europe. Now the two great mediæval institutions of the North were feudalism and monasticism; the one enslaved men's bodies, the other their minds. No intellectual movement which drew its inspiration from such a period could influence Carducci.

If the pagan world as compared with the Christian seemed to him as sunlight to darkness, classicism beside romanticism was as sunlight to moonlight. There is a poem of his that, read without its title, would be just a beautiful objective description of the two planets that light our earth by night and by day, but he has

ironically named it *Classicismo e romanticismo*, and given us the clue. We know, as we follow his descriptions, that *classicismo* is the sun, *romanticismo* the moon. The sun, he says, glistens on the ploughshare in the furrow, smiles upon fertility and man's labour, yellows the grain, reddens the grape and gladdens the windows of the poor; but the moon, pale, infecund ghost, loves best to embellish ruins and graveyards and adorn our melancholy, to waken the poor man at night to remember his griefs, to befriend wastrel poets and lawless lovers—she ripens neither flower nor fruit.

Looking at Carducci's poetry as a whole, we perceive that he and his ideas present a double paradox. In political ideas a modern, in his artistic and intellectual sympathies we find him among the ancients; whilst his form and content contradict one another, since he is a lyric poet almost devoid of lyricism. It would be as presumptuous as idle to attempt to estimate his ultimate significance, but we can suggest that it will be different for Europe and for Italy. For Italy it is his ideas that count; the austerity of his literary taste and his intolerance of what is facile must act like a tonic upon the literature of a language so fatally full of rhymes and a people so fatally gifted at improvisation as the Italian, while his idealism, courage, single-mindedness, and his belief in the destiny of his country, will kindle the Italian heart to noble resolution.

But outside of Italy it is not for his ideas that he will live and be beloved. They inspired too many local poems, too many merely political, too many merely

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angry. And save for the belief in democracy, they are not the ideas of his time. His prejudices keep him from being an intellectual power, his inability to understand Christianity puts him out of touch with his world; he is a thankless child to the Romantic Movement which helped produce him, and his bright impersonalism too often declines the poet's duty of baring his own heart in order to reveal to us our own. In all these ways he fails to be to the Northern peoples *simpatico*. It must be by sheer beauty that he can prevail, but of sheer beauty there is enough.

Something of it, possibly, may show through this version of the sonnet on the death of the poet's little son Dante. The poem is addressed to Carducci's brother Dante, dead in their youth by his own hand.

### *"Funere mersit acerbo"*

O thou among the Tuscan hills asleep,  
Laid with our father in one grassy bed,  
Faintly, through the green sod above thy head,  
Hast thou not heard a plaintive child's voice weep?  
It is my little son; at thy dark keep  
He knocketh, he who bore thy name, thy dread  
And sacred name—he too this life hath fled  
Whose ways, my brother, thou didst find so steep.

Among the flower-borders as he played,  
By sunny childish visions smiled upon,  
The Shadow caught him to that world how other—  
Thy world long since. So now to that chill shade  
Oh, welcome him! as backward toward the sun  
He turns his head to look and call his mother.

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THE RECENT literary history of Italy goes some way towards confirming the notion that an excessive personalism, an excessive lyricism, may be the literary aftermath of war. Alfred de Musset, at the outset of his *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, trying to explain the malady of his century, a malady of disillusionment and ultraromanticism, lays it first of all to the Napoleonic wars. The children of his generation, he says, born of anxious, sometimes sorrow-stricken mothers, and brought up in the absence of their soldier fathers, although they developed slowly, with inadequate bodies and strained nerves, yet knew all the while that they were living in a world where glory was the rule. But when they arrived at manhood, the wars over, they found themselves forced to live in a world emptied of glory. Brought up on emotion, bred to the habit of intensity, now that external objects were no longer engrossing enough to engage them, they turned inward upon their own life, and the French Romantic Movement was one of the results.

So the long heroic period of Italian history—the years of her self-sacrificing struggle for independence—has been succeeded by an era of literary production in which her classic tradition has suffered a like interruption.

Mr. Santayana has said that "great works of art appear only in ages of moral unity or immediately after," and certainly, during her years of striving, Italy had her unifying great poet in Carducci. His verse was as objective, as heroic, as impersonal as war itself. He shared the deep passion of his day, but spent it upon objects outside his own life—upon patriotism, nature, art, the past. His great period extended for nearly a score of years after the wars were ended, but then there began to be heard the generation that had been nurtured in war and had grown up to peace. The change is striking. Carducci's own immediate successor, not only to the laureateship of Italian poetry but more literally to his professor's chair at Bologna, was a man who, if he loved all that Carducci loved, loved also all that he hated—sentiment, the romantic spirit, Christianity. Withal he was one of the most purely personal poets who ever wrote. Much more so even than Musset, since to write of love, as the French poet did, is to be, while personal, universal; but Pascoli, whose love affairs were few or none, and pale, tells again and again with the utmost detail a story which is exclusively and peculiarly his own.

To Benedetto Croce, the great Italian critic, it seems that through all the work of the three chief figures in Italian literature of the last thirty years, D'Annunzio, Fogazzaro and Pascoli, "there blows a breath of insincerity." For Pascoli, at least, this appears unjust, unless Croce means that form of unconscious insincerity which is sentimentality. For Pascoli was not con-



sciously insincere (as it would not be hard to prove that D'Annunzio, for example, is); but a tragedy darkened his life and he never recovered from it, never tried to, and he never ceased striving for the complete artistic expression of it. Yet, appalling as that tragedy was, a lifetime of emotion spent upon it was too much. It would be too much for any event of purely personal significance; in the end there would always seem a disproportion between the emotion and its object, and such disproportion is what we must suppose sentimentality to be. But let us examine the source of Pascoli's melancholy. And indeed it is not easy, even for the critic, to avoid Pascoli's sentimental note in speaking of his life.

Giovanni Pascoli was born, of honourable burgher stock, in 1855, the fourth of ten children. His childhood, spent in and near the little village of San Mauro, in the province of Forlì, was warmed by a domestic life which must have been sweet to have left such a fragrant memory all his days. But clouds soon began to drift across the quiet sky. When Pascoli was seven, quite old enough to feel the darkness and strangeness of the event, a little sister died, under a year old. When he was ten, another died at the age of five. Two years later, in the summer of 1867, fell the heart-breaking blow from which the affectionate little household never recovered. On the 10th of August of that year, Ruggero, the head and father of the family, as he was driving homeward from a neighbouring village, was set upon and murdered in the public highway. The

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spirited grey mare, which had been harnessed into his cart in the morning, came home with slow steps at evening, dragging the reins, with her master's broken body across her back.

This event always wore for the poet an historic, an epic aspect. All the details of it, such as grief loves to feed upon, appear and reappear in his pages until we feel that there are few occurrences in our own lives that we know as well as we do this childhood sorrow of a man we never saw. The fullest narration he gives us is in a poem entitled "A Memory," which serves not only as a piece of biography, but as an illustration of the defects of Pascoli's method, which we shall consider later. It describes that sorrowful day in the family annals as a child's letter might; it is as vivid, and as almost shockingly naïve:

A pair of cooing turtle-doves close by  
Were brooding in the straw. My mother said:  
"Come early home." "Thou knowest I'll make haste."  
"Don't drive too fast, the mare is scarcely broken."  
"She minds me well enough." "Good-bye." "Good-bye."  
"Alone? Why not take Jen?" "Oh, I expect  
To meet that gentleman from Rome." "That's true.  
We'll go to meet thee towards San Mauro. Look  
For us beside the wayside cross." "I'll see you!"

Then Margherita, the big sister, said:  
"Father?" "What fearest thou?" "We heard to-day  
Of bandits killing folk along the roads."  
My father bent above her with a smile,

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Shaking wise head. My mother looked at her  
With those dear mother-eyes, as if she said:  
"How canst thou think such thoughts?" The swallows came  
And went, joyous about their happy nests.

My father stroked the mare, which rubbed her head  
Against him trustfully. The traces, girths,  
He felt with care; then picking up the reins,  
Tranquil and grave, he turned to say good-bye,  
My mother near, her youngest by the hand.  
His foot was on the step. The youngest one  
Caught at his whip, and cried: "Papa! Papa!"

He felt the whip caught in a tiny clutch,  
As in a strand of looped convolvulus.  
A little hand was clasping it, a hand  
So young it could not close round anything.  
The baby,—as she twisted round the whip  
Her small pink fingers, crying: "No, no, no!"—

My father lifted to his shoulder, hoarse  
With weeping, kissed and kissed again her eyes  
Drenched with strange grief. "Thou wilt not that I go?"  
"No, no!" "Why not? I'll bring thee pretty things."  
"No, no!" He put her down. Her fingers still  
Stretched for the whip, one hand upon his knee.

No sound that sunny morning save her cries.  
The mare's sharp hoofs no longer scraped the flags,  
She turned her slender head round towards the child.  
Poor baby, she was not yet two years old,  
She still slept in the cradle, and her cries  
Were just a baby's still. My father said:  
"Nay, I'll not go." And the doves cooed close by.

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Jen, at a sign, then led away the mare  
(She sharply neighed as she was led away)  
And left her waiting at the other door.  
My father kissed the child, said: "See, I go not.  
Come in, I change my mind, and stay with thee.  
For surety, for a pledge, keep thou my whip."

She quivered like a ruffling bird; then, still,  
She clasped the bamboo whip between her hands  
And waited. She waits still. For nevermore  
Returned the father, nevermore was seen  
Within his house. That night they carried him  
Away, they stretched him on a marble bed.

His head was gashed, one hand was stained with blood.  
They said, ah yes, they said that he was strong,  
That but for this he had lived many years.  
Maria, sister, that pledge left with thee,  
That something of our father that was left,  
The whip in thy small hand—where is it now?

The destruction of the wage-earner reduced the family income, though they had a house and garden in the village of San Mauro, and a pension from Prince Torlonia, whose steward Ruggiero had been. But death and sorrow had not done with them yet. In the year after Ruggiero's death, the eldest child, Margherita, died of typhoid at sixteen, and within a month the mother followed her, worn out with grieving. Three years later Luigi, Giovanni's next older brother, died of meningitis, and shortly after that Giovanni's early sweetheart, a weaver girl, of consumption. Five years later his oldest brother, Giacomo, the only married one, died,

and his two small children after him, leaving Giovanni the head of a family which now consisted of his brothers Raffaello and Giuseppe, his sisters Ida and Maria, and the widowed sister-in-law. He was only twenty-one when he had acquired this extraordinary familiarity with death. The effect of it was to give him to an unusual degree a sense of the parity of the two worlds of death and life. Like the little girl in Wordsworth's poem, he counted the living and the dead as members of one family, sharers of one interest and affection, and for the rest of his life the larger census of those near to him must be taken in the tomb. "Sad and only house of my kinsfolk," he calls it.

Yet with this vivid sense of death as the reverse face of life, and of its equality with it, he held no religious faith. To Christianity he was indeed sympathetic, he called it "the poetry of the universe," and even liked to keep a candle lighted before the Virgin's picture above his hearth. But he did not so much believe in the Christian religion as enjoy it. His attitude was rather indulgent than devout. If his dead spoke to him, they spoke from no mansion in the skies, but directly from the tomb, as in the poem "All Souls' Day," where they complain of the cruel winter that shakes their house, of their loneliness now that their living children are far, of anxiety for the two young sisters. Always they are near by, melancholy, sweet and sacred companions, idealized by long absence, but still full of the cares and loves that absorbed them living.

But to return to the outward events of Pascoli's life:

In 1873, when he was eighteen, he won a scholarship at the University of Bologna, which two years later he forfeited by an escapade that led to his allying himself for the next five years with the *Internazionale*, an anarchist association which flourished in ever-turbulent Bologna. We read of a newspaper called the *Hammer*, which was edited in a tailor's kitchen where penniless Giovanni could at least keep warm; it was suppressed almost as often as it appeared, and if his more discreet brother Raffaello had not shared his poor lodging and a crust Giovanni must have starved. As it was, he aroused the suspicions of the authorities sufficiently to cause his arrest, and his subjection, after the quaint Italian fashion, to nearly three months of "preventive imprisonment." This proved both preventive and curative, and he emerged to set himself steadily to one near duty—that of completing his education, securing a position, and finally establishing a home to which to bring his sisters. They were then in school at the convent at Sogliano, but after four years he received the appointment which enabled him to realize his dream and fulfill, as he deemed, his obligations to the dead. There in the Lunigiana his sisters joined him, and there was begun the long idyllic story of a fraternal and sisterly devotion which is pictured in many of his poems, and has become a legend in literary Italy. The small united group had to suffer frequent transplantations at first, to suit the exigencies of the Italian system of professorial appointment. Three years at Massa were followed by eight at Leghorn, which saw the beginning of literary production in both Italian



and Latin. It was then that he began to compete annually for the Amsterdam prize in Latin poetry. One supposes that his competitors in this neglected activity may have been few, but, whoever they were, they found in Pascoli a formidable rival; year after year, with discouraging regularity, he won at least honourable mention, and captured the gold medal fourteen times in a score of years.

The medals brought him better than honours. In 1895 his sister Ida married, leaving him alone with Maria who had been the importunate baby of the morning of their father's dying day, and for their life together, which Pascoli perhaps foresaw was to last as long as he should live, he desired a house of his own. He would gladly have bought back the house where they had dwelt at San Mauro as children, and from whose garden he had borne away a slip of lemon verbena which had survived all their peregrinations; but the owner held out for too high a price, so another was found far up the valley of the Serchio, at Castelvecchio di Barga. Pascoli melted up the gold medals from Amsterdam, and bought it. Here he settled happily with Maria, and here they lived a life that was all poetry, written and unwritten. They had a dog, named Guli, who appears frequently in verse, and a garden, and a balcony; there was always a welcome for the visitor, a favourite dish of *fritta mista* for Puccini, a special bedchamber for D'Annunzio; and the lemon verbena of their childhood had its last replanting. Their stay suffered the long interruption of seven years at Messina,

but they joyfully returned upon their summons back to Pisa, and when in 1905 Carducci retired from his post at Bologna, not naming his choice of successor, Pascoli was the students' choice—either Pascoli or D'Annunzio. As in those days, at least, the selection of D'Annunzio was unthinkable, the Minister offered the post to Pascoli.

Pascoli's teaching of literature does not seem to have been so satisfactory as his earlier work in language and grammar. This may have been because he already bore within him the seeds of the cruel disease of which he was to die. Years before, in one of those albums which aim to dissect character according to preferences in the matter of colours, tunes, heroines of fiction, and manner of death, in answer to the query: "What do you consider the greatest misfortune?" Pascoli had written: "To die too soon." This greatest misfortune befell him. He died in 1912 at the age of fifty-seven, in a feverish activity of unfinished work, begging the doctors for two more years, and mourned by the entire peninsula. He was buried at Castelvecchio, and there in the much sung little house and garden lives Maria to this day.

Out of the life with his sisters, especially that with Maria alone, in the little house bought with gold, grew Pascoli's most characteristic volumes—*Myricæ* ("Tamarisks"), the "Songs of Castelvecchio," and the first and second series of *Poemetti*. It was a modest life, close to the ground. They dwelt in a little village, in a little garden, without a servant. The primary ac-

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tivities of living went on under their eyes. A nest of wild bees in the room he chose for his study Pascoli did not permit to be disturbed, hoping to mend his habits of work by watching theirs. He breaks off one poem to go and knead the bread. It was a very real life, and a life of very little things. Indeed, Pascoli is the poet of very little things: the broom in the corner had its song, and the kneading-board, and the pan bubbling with fat upon the stove. The flowers and herbs in the garden, the birds called each by name, the dog, the church-bell across the valley, clothing put to boil in the huge copper kettle or spread to dry upon the grass, clouds, rain, sun, winds, a few faintly sketched village characters, his sister, his memories—these, used again and again, always with simplicity, sweetness, and frank enjoyment, are Pascoli's poetic subjects. A world of small, vivid, present actualities, a child's world. And presented, as we realize on reflection, with almost a child's want of discrimination. Dogs, flowers, and human beings are in the same plane. The childlikeness is not accidental; for when in 1907, completing a study he had published in part ten years earlier, he issued his literary manifesto, stated his poetic platform, its core and centre was precisely the statement that the poet's world is the child's world.

The poet who is said to have died young in all of us is a little child, a *fanciullino*, as Pascoli calls him. And what things interest him? Not romantic love, certainly, nor his own psychology, nor philosophy. It is external objects that attract him, especially the

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near and the little; and these, according to Pascoli, are the subject-matter of your true poet. Homer, says Pascoli, was such a poet. We are to think of him as an old blind man whom a little child led by the hand. The child tells him what it sees, and he sings of it. "It is not love," says Pascoli in a long passage in which he describes the *fanciullino*, "it is not women, however fair and goddess-like, that interest little children, but bronze shields and war-chariots and distant journeys and storms at sea. So such things were recounted to Homer by his *fanciullino*, and he made his report in his own infantile speech. He returned from villages perhaps no further distant than the hamlet which lies up nearest the shepherds on the mountainside; but he talked of it to other children who had never been there at all. He talked at length, with enthusiasm, telling the particulars one after another, omitting nothing. For to him everything that he had seen appeared new and beautiful, and it seemed to him must appear to his auditors beautiful and new. He was always engraving upon his discourse a mark to know each thing by. He would say that the ships were black, that they had their prows painted, . . . that the sea was of diverse colours, was always in motion, was salty, was foamy. So as not to be misunderstood, he would repeat the same thought under another form and say: 'very little, by no means much.' . . . He can never be too clear: 'The chicks were eight, nine with the mother, who had made the chicks.' . . . For the blind man's *fanciullino* did not seek to do himself honour, but only to be understood;

he never exaggerated, because the facts which he recounted seemed to him wonderful enough just as they were."

His Homeric *fanciullino* had a profound influence upon Pascoli's language. For if one sets out to present as many objects as a child sees, one must have names for them, and Pascoli found Italian poetry still bound under the classical tradition of a "poetic" vocabulary. Specific words, names of things familiar to prose, were excluded. There had been some argument on this before Pascoli. De Amicis had recommended, in a volume on language (*L'idioma gentile*), that young poets study the special vocabularies of the carpenter's shop and the smithy, of the garden and the dairy and the kitchen, and Croce had attacked this theory very bitterly, asking if it were intended that young Italians should become cooks in order to become poets. But few English readers will disagree with Pascoli's desire to extend the vocabulary of poetry. Indeed, one of the great difficulties at first for the English reader of Italian verse (with the bright exception of Dante) is its too generalized vocabulary. Even such personal lyristes as Petrarch and Leopardi, although they analyse themselves minutely, generalize external objects to excess. Once, it is true, Leopardi does specify roses and violets as combined in the nosegay of his village beauty, and Pascoli maliciously inquires whether we are to suppose Leopardi believed them to be in blossom at the same season.

Now Pascoli was not a stranger to anything that

bloomed or sang near his study. From his books might be compiled a manual of the flora and fauna of the Lunigiana. As a reviewer said of Madison Cawein, he "wrote with exactness of dittany and the yellow puckworth, of mallow, ironweed, bluet and jewel-weed, the cohosh, oxalis and Indian pipe." To be sure, he overdid his search for the *mot juste*; he ransacked the dialects of all the localities where he lived, borrowed from the queer Americanized Italian of returned emigrants, and invented onomatopoetic vocabularies for the birds and the frogs, for pots and pans and brooms, for the bicycle-bell and the church-bell, and was driven at last to insert glossaries in his volumes of verse. But English readers, since the Romantic Movement banished our own classical canon, are not to be abashed by the homely, and it is hard for us to sympathize with Croce's rather savage criticism of Pascoli's use in poetry of the Bolognese form of his own name Giovanni—Zvanì. It occurs in the poem entitled "The Voice," wherein he tells how his mother's remembered voice at critical moments has recalled him to duty by speaking in his ear his pet-name, "Zvanì." What! says Croce, use a trivial dialect word to represent the stately speech of the dead? He thinks it almost irreverent, certainly in bad taste. Yet Dante does not disdain to repeat fragments of baby-talk in the august circles of the *Inferno*; and if our dead came back to us speaking only the high idiom of heaven, would they not more embarrass us than comfort?

Such, then, is Pascoli's theory of poetry, and at first



thought it is a seductive one. The *fanciullino* describes what he sees, describes the beautiful externals of the world and the minute things of the hearthside, and we remember and are glad. But on second thought we recall how many things we are interested in that our *fanciullino* knows nothing of. Love and philosophy interest us; are we to hear nothing of them in our poetry? No, says Pascoli, love is not poetic, but dramatic; and he cites as an example Roland, who in *Orlando innamorato* is merely dramatic, not poetic as he was in the old French epic. Very true. But the difference lies less in the subject-matter than in the manner of presenting it. Thuoldus the minstrel was in earnest, Boiardo in the same degree was not. And we may argue that the analogy with Homer breaks down at the same point. He sang of a world that was new to everybody, to auditors who had not yet seen it reflected in literature. He had the delight of giving things their first literary shape. To name them in poetry for the first time was in some measure to create them. He and his hearers were all young together, as young as the *fanciullino*. But for a modern poet to strive to denude himself of all we have since acquired of sophistication and subtlety, to try consciously to be as naïve as Homer, is to adopt so limited a point of view as to make himself almost a *poseur*. Is this what Croce meant, perhaps, by the breath of insincerity? At any rate, it partly explains that form of insincerity, sentimentality, for whose presence we were prepared. For if we rule out passion and thought from the realm

of poetry, we must throw an undue weight of feeling into the more purely idyllic aspects of human life—family affection, childhood, the sweet minutiae of country life. More emotion will find its way into such things than they will hold. It is clear that if we are to have poetry written exclusively by the *fanciullino*, it must be small in scope. Very beautiful in kind, no doubt; it might have included the “Faerie Queene,” “Tiger, tiger, burning bright!”, “Snow-Bound,” “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”; but the *fanciullino* could never have written “Adonais,” or “The Duchess of Malfi,” or the “Ode on the Intimations of Immortality.” Matthew Arnold, Milton, Austin Dobson, Dryden, to name but these, could hardly have written at all if they had had to listen to their *fanciullino*, for it is much to be doubted whether they had one. The *fanciullino* could not write dramatic poetry, nor meditative poetry, nor love poetry. He could not even write lyric poetry, because for this it is not enough to be personal, one must be personal about one’s emotions; and Pascoli is content to remember incidents without telling, as Petrarch did, how they made him feel. “All recollection,” he says in one of his prefaces, “is poetry. Poetry is only recollection.” But in such a poem as “A Memory,” it is more than recollection, it is “total recall.” For the *fanciullino* is no artist; his memory is no more selective than a child’s. Even in “A Memory” the translator would prefer to suppress certain lines as being too strained, too sentimental. What is

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an English translator to make of a line of blank verse which runs?:—

“No, no! Papa! No, no! Papa! No, no!”

Or take this poem, “The Elder Sister,” written of Margherita, who died at sixteen:

She rocked to sleep the baby brother,  
She mended what the rest had torn;  
She knew not, little maiden-mother,  
How we are born.

She’d sit and careful stitches set,  
In her small corner, busy, wise,  
For babies Mother was to get  
From the skies.

But now the sparrows chirp their lay  
Around a little cross near by,  
For well she learned, poor child, one day,  
How we die.

Allowing for the drawbacks of translation, is not this perfect in construction, as well as poetic in feeling? But the *fanciullino* has no instinct for construction, he does not know how much is enough, so he goes on writing until his little poem runs to three times this length.

If, then, the *fanciullino* is too literal to write acceptably of his own life, too young for philosophy or love, what kind of poetry can he write, what kind can be written on Pascoli’s theory? The epic, perhaps—though not such epics as “Paradise Lost” and the “Divine Comedy”—but certainly the nature poem and the idyl;

for these, the *fanciullino's* eye for little things, his very literalness, are qualities and not defects. And, for these, Pascoli's gifts were of the first order—the fidelity of his memory, his minute powers of observation, more than all, perhaps, his feeling for place. This, we have been told by an English poet, is deeply characteristic of English poets. One of their great accomplishments, according to Mr. Masfield, has been their consecration of place; "they made places interesting simply by mentioning them." This has not been a quality of Italian poets. Their poetry has never had a strongly native hue. They seem not to feel the poetry of Italy as Englishmen feel the poetry of England, or when they do, it is of some part that is a little strange to them; the Piedmontese will thrill to the beauty of Naples, a Central Italian pay a compliment to Venice. But Pascoli has a truly English love for his own corner, his own Romagna, his own village, which he succeeds in communicating. The poetic *carte de tendre* must hereafter have marked upon it San Mauro, Castelvechio, the church of San Niccolò, the village of San Pietro in Campo. When Pascoli says "half-way between San Mauro and Savignano," he evokes at once that familiar glare of long white road, the procession of small shapely hills to one side with rows of mulberries looped with grapevines stretching away to the other, and far ahead a walled city of rose-tinged grey fitting a hill-top like a coronet.

Pascoli's most delightful and most successful work is to be found in the idyls of the volumes called

*Poemetti*, in which he treats his subjects in a manner somewhat more impersonal and objectified than in *Myricæ* and the "Songs of Castelvecchio." It is the poets in this world who have chiefly taught us our expectations, and if life does not often meet them, we do not therefore bear any grudge against the poets; rather we love to be so deceived, and are grateful to each new one who gives us fresh expectation, who encourages us to feel intensely, to believe that life is to be felt intensely about. The sight of one who seems to find contentment in small, old-fashioned things casts a glamour over our own quiet commonplace, and colours it with romance. This is a thing Pascoli can pre-eminently do for us, above all by idealizing country life; and in this series of pictures of the daily activities of a single family of *contadini*, he found the happiest use for the talents of his *fanciullino*. These poems are a kind of modern Italian "Georgics," evoking under the same skies and against the same landscape the descendants of those who ploughed or kept bees in the Virgilian poems. His family of peasants are hardly more characterized than the speakers of an eclogue, but as we see the little group about their various tasks, Pascoli's exquisite details, delicate and clear as a Japanese print, reveal anew the lost beauty of a patriarchal world, the vivid sense of reality and stability which inheres in a life that must be built up afresh out of its elements every morning—water drawn, fires laid, meals made ready—and the poetry in each one of these activities that minister so directly to living. From this series of

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household idyls, which picture everything from the gathering of olives to the boiling of linen, I choose one called "In the House." This kind of poetry suffers most, unfortunately, from translation, since it depends most on atmosphere and vocabulary and least on form and idea, and it is perhaps to do Pascoli a disservice to try to render these poems at all. But in them speaks the *fanciullino* at his best, and they are a perfect illustration of the author's poetic theory:

As white-armed Rosa set the shutters wide,  
A lark's song hailed her, distant and enskied.

The church-bell clanged near by to greet the dawn;  
The dog rose, shook the dew off with a yawn;

A hen was clucking. Now the church-bell's tongue  
Fell silent, and she heard the chaffinch-song,

And through the fields, still tinged with violet,  
The screech of pruning-knife to grindstone set.

All shutters open now, the rustling broom  
Passed sharply, swiftly, up and down the room.

Smoke from the chimney hung on the still air.  
A clatter sounded of the kitchenware.

The gold-haired girl was weaving; shuttle flew,  
And warping-rope and combing-carder too.

The maiden sang, and as she sang there came,  
'Twixt song and clack of carder, her own name—

"Rosina," someone called. She rose and went  
Into the kitchen, on swift errand bent.



G I O V A N N I P A S C O L I

"Daughter," her mother said, "now sift the meal,  
While I these tufts and heads of succory peel,

And fry a sprig of garlic chopped up small,  
And make polenta, good for rich, poor, all!

Your father'll not get home till curfew-bell.  
You know, with grain, to hurry's always well.

Too soon is sometimes bad, late always is.  
Already now the tired cicada sees

The end of summer. On this heavy air  
The first storm broods. The ducks begin to fare

To southward, flying with swift whirl of wings  
Above the house; sadly the cricket sings."

Rosa obeyed the wonted fond command.  
Under the kettle, with her strong white hand,

She laid the wood, and soon its song was heard;  
The sieve between her hands, quick as a bird,

Flew scattering the meal swift to and fro;  
The meal fell softly in a golden snow.

And when she'd sifted all in, bit by bit,  
She mixed and stirred and slapped and kneaded it.

Then, on her knees before the fire's bright glow,  
Softly detaching from the pan the dough

With a slim poplar-stick, she turned it out,  
And wrapped it firmly in a clean white clout.

The mother poured a silent rivulet  
Of oil into a pan, the pan then set

## ITALIAN SILHOUETTES

Upon the coals; when it began to boil,  
Quick on the herbs she poured the fragrant oil.

The dish full of polenta then Rose took,  
And carried to her father by the brook.

It is not impossible that there are poets who can address only our *fanciullino*. Perhaps Pascoli was one of them. We have no quarrel with this, since the idyllic is so beautiful and precious a kind of poetry; what we challenge is his erecting his own limitations into a theory, his saying that such, and such only, is poetry. But if he made the naïve mistake of building a rule and canon out of that kind of poetry which he chanced to be able to write, we may leave it to the historians of criticism to judge his theories while lovers of poetry neglect them for his poems.

## ANNIE VIVANTI

IN THE year 1890 there came to Carducci's house in Bologna, alone with her English governess, a girl of twenty-one with blue flowers on her hat, who sent up word to the poet that she had come from a distance to see him. The servant returned presently with the message that his master was not King Solomon. Carducci did, however, consent to see the young Sheban, and, as all the world knows, ended by granting her preposterous request for a preface to her volume of verses, which Treves Brothers of Milan had refused to print unless she got it. This must have been a condition about as likely of fulfilment as those the cruel stepmother was always making in the German fairy-tales, since Carducci says in the first sentence: "In my poetic creed it is written that women and priests cannot write poetry"; but Annie Vivanti's verses made him hasten to find a place for her among women poets, just a little lower than the three authentic angels whom he had hitherto accepted—Sappho (no less), Marcelline Desbordes-Valmore, and Mrs. Browning. In a review of the book after it finally came out, he mentioned her want of form (but hardly as if this were a defect, artist though he was), and advised her not to trade upon this extraordinary girlish success of a book written without

study, without reading, almost as naturally as a bird sings. He reminded her that an author can write but one such book, and that she must beware of trying to repeat or imitate herself. Annie Vivanti took his advice so seriously that, save for a slight autobiographic novel published a few months later, she held her peace for twenty years.

Annie Vivanti was born in London. Her father, Anselmo Vivanti, had been a conspirator and Garibaldino who wore the red shirt in 1860, and once at least received that death-sentence from the Austrian government which was equivalent to a certificate of patriotism. As one of them once said to the writer: "We thought nothing of death in those days, *Signorina*. We thought only of the *bel discorso* we were going to make from the scaffold!" Her mother was German, of the cultivated family of Lindau. One of her brothers, Rudolph Lindau, secretary of the German embassy at Paris, was the friend of both Thiers and Bismarck, and wrote novels in both French and English; the other was Paul Lindau, a dramatist and critic who lived in Paris and was dear to George Sand; her niece was a popular authoress, who received the honours of translation, while she herself wrote smooth tranquil verses in English and German, and had a kind of German *salon* during the London years. These years gave Annie Vivanti the English Bible, this mother gave her the German folktales, the poetry of Heine, and German for a mother-tongue. When she was nine, they removed to Italy, and three years later her mother died. She was sent

up into Switzerland, then to London, and even to New York, until homesickness drove her back to Italy. There she had been for three years when Treves Brothers bade her get her preface from Carducci, and her own brother Italo, reassuring her as to the poet's being still alive, encouraged her to make the attempt. She had supposed the great Carducci was as dead as Milton. As he was to say to her once, years later: "Restful to me is thy ignorance!"

Here are a few of the poems she took with her to Bologna. It is not hard to understand why, as the work of a girl in her teens, and thirty years ago, Carducci was struck with them; but if we compare them with the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" or the *Idylles* and *Élégies*, it is easy to see, though evidently Carducci did not see, that they are inferior in two qualities almost indispensable to poetry—intensity and sincerity. With "the sweet apple reddening upon the topmost bough" it would never occur to most people to compare them at all. Although Annie Vivanti had apparently read little or nothing, still the poems of "Lorenzo Stecchetti" and the "Countess Lara" had been in print for a decade or so, the air must have been full of them, and these poems evidently owe something to the fact that Annie Vivanti was their contemporary. A girlish diabolism in them is the opposite pole to a girlish sentimentalism, and both could find ancestry in the two older poets. She is of the newer generation in this, however, that to her personal confessions she does not hesitate to sign her own name. Her volume leads off

## ITALIAN SILHOUETTES

with "Ego" and follows it with "New!", and all these verses announce a wit and fire which are what make the charm of her maturer books.

### EGO

O World, old guardian of your custom-house,  
Like a good Christian take your toll of me.  
Your penalites may be severe and just,  
For I don't mean to give you any fee.

O astute World, I carry contraband.  
I'll trick you if I can and spare my purse.  
I've no tobacco, liquors nor cigars,  
No alcoholic spirits: only verse!

The old World opened wide his thousand eyes  
And cried: "Now, what's your business? What's your  
name?  
Of what religion are you? From what land?  
How old are you? Where going, and whence came?"

"You ask my country? I can only say  
I have none. Or perhaps it is the earth.  
A German mother, an Italian sire—  
But England was the country of my birth.

"And my religion? Well, I go to mass,  
The music pleases me, uplifts me too;  
But then I was baptized a Protestant,  
And have the name and profile of a Jew.

"How old am I? Not yet quite twenty years.  
My purpose? None. At life I fling my glove.  
What seek I? Nothing. I await my fate,  
And laugh and sing and weep, and fall in love.



## ANNIE VIVANTI

"And Earth and Heaven, Paradise and Hell,  
I brush all with imagination's wings!  
I ask no more. Impetuous and strange,  
My life takes new roads seeking out new things.

"It flees the darkness, it believes in light,  
My strong, calm, faithful soul trusts to the breath  
Of Inspiration. Whither? What is life?  
These mighty problems will be solved by death."

### NEW!

I will not sing old songs of love's soft hours,  
Eternal April, white light of the moon;  
I'm sick of your blue skies and stars and flowers,  
The breeze, the little boats, and the lagoon!

I'm sick of serenades and mandolins,  
Of pallid pages and of blonde coquettes,  
That crowd of sad and sickly manikins  
Who only live in odes and canzonets.

I want a new song, desperate and strong,  
Contemptuous of rules, disdaining rhyme;  
I want a love that turns death to a song,  
And genius, with its lunacy sublime! . . .

### IN A FEW WEEKS

In a few weeks, when I stop loving you,  
I shall have back my old impertinent smile,  
I shall have back my perfidy and guile,  
And make men fall in love, as hitherto.

In a few weeks, when I stop loving you,  
I'll take up my old ways without regret,

## ITALIAN SILHOUETTES

Contented to avoid you and forget,  
Serene, oblivious, without adieu.

In a few weeks, when I stop loving you,  
If I encounter you, severe and pale,  
I'll pass you by without a word or hail,  
Bright-eyed, light-hearted, on the avenue.

To love to-day and to forget to-morrow,  
Such is my fate. Then reap this one hour's gain,  
The flower of my kisses, the sweet sorrow,  
And sweet enchantment of love's joy and pain.

No, no, do not turn pale—kiss me again!

## WHO KNOWS?

The long night has refused me any sleep.  
At last the dawn grows red,  
And up the eastern sky the gold beams creep,  
And every star is dead.

Who knows if it be true that there above  
Dwells God, to love and dread?  
I think of you, and of your faithless love,  
And of my mother, dead.

## AVE ALBION!

England! dark, chilly, misty English strand,  
Abhorrèd country wherein I had birth,  
With all thy sleepy folk of solid worth,  
May God forsake thee, cursèd English land!

O English husbands, thin and pink and tall!  
O melancholy misses with gold hair,

ANNIE VIVANTI

Is it the climate dulls and chills you there,  
Long bundles, with umbrella and a shawl?

O wise folk, with affections calm, controlled,  
Whose laughter is well-bred, whose speech is low,  
Give me some sunshine, give me the fire's glow,  
Accursèd English folk that are so cold!

Give me wild love, give me a furious hate,  
Quick vengeance of the South, come ill or weal!  
The flash of angry looks, the flash of steel,  
Mad anger, with forgiveness never late!

Give me the easy laugh, the stormy tears,  
The speech of my Italia sweet and glad;  
Carry away wrapped in your shawls of plaid  
Your stiffness and conventional false fears.

O English, with your colds! I'd have you know  
Your miry land shall not lodge me again.  
O tiresome people of eternal rain,  
Go on your big feet to perdition—go!

Every now and then someone says again, with a certain air of smartness as if he were making a new joke, that there are so many books nowadays that it begins to be a distinction not to have written one. The joker has failed to distinguish between writing a book and publishing one. There are far more books being published than were ever written. Organized book-production is not writing, providing the raw material for someone else to assemble a book out of is not writing, issuing reports and statistics and text-books is not writing. But when someone appears who with the

gift of personality has also the gift of words, then a book is written, and it will not be mistaken for anything else than the work of art it is. Such a book was Annie Vivanti's "The Devourers," the novel which in 1910 broke her long silence. But her voice, unlike Virgil's when he came to the rescue of Dante in the Wood, was not hoarse from long disuse. It was clearer than ever. Carducci had recognized in the young poetess a lyric temperament—"a very rare thing in woman"—and at that time it would not have occurred to either of them to suppose that it was not at its best in verse. And, indeed, Annie Vivanti's poems have had high praise. Not only did Carducci write the famous Preface, and an admiring review; Brandes has translated them into Danish, Paul Heyse into German, Jaroslav Vrchlicky into Czech. But Croce and Papini hang back. Papini, however, since he can tolerate no one but Leonardo da Vinci, and has had to make even him over and edit him for private use, we may dismiss as being a little too hard to please. Besides, it is next to impossible for him to discover literary excellence in a woman. But Croce gives us a hint that is more serviceable, when he says that in *Lirica* Annie Vivanti sees herself, or is wishful of seeing herself, as Carmen. It is true that the sum total of her poems seem to paint her as the "fatal" woman, forever *insouciante*, intense but capricious, who enjoys falling in love but knows she will fall out again. This suggests Carmen to Benedetto Croce, it might suggest a different personage to a different critic, but the point lies in the fact that the author envisages herself as some-

body else, anybody else, that she was ever so little, in that first book of poems, at "not quite twenty years," a *poseuse*.

Yet in spite of a young selfconsciousness which has a touch of bravado, it tells the truth about Annie Vivanti as closely as she knew how to see it herself. Indeed, Carducci insisted that her intensest quality was the gift of expressing her own personality, and classed her among the Romantics on this account; nevertheless it was a personality a little heightened, a little disguised, as at a masked ball where it is possible to be more daring, more fascinating, more alluring than one can quite contrive at home in everyday clothes. In "The Devourers" Annie Vivanti has donned the everyday clothes of prose, and since her choicest gift, after all, is her gift of humour, they become her well. Since *Lirica*, the poetess has married one of those cold Englishmen and gone back to live in miry Albion, her little daughter has become a violinist, and she herself has been swallowed up in the needs of her child-prodigy. This story, beginning with her own prodigious girlhood as a sensational young poetess in Italy, she tells, though not in her own name, in the brilliantly written "Devourers," a novel with an idea, the idea of the necessary but devastating selfishness of genius. Every genius "devours" the lives of those nearest him.

Her silence once broken, the author wrote several more novels and some plays of which one is in French, and translated "The Devourers" into the most delicious Italian prose, with a preface which is a gem of per-

sonal writing and a portent of her best book. This last is "*Zingaresca*," in which she has dropped even the pretence of fiction and the third person, and emerges as Mrs. Chartres, who dines at embassies and serves on committees, whose husband is a well-known publicist named John, and whose daughter is the famous child-violinist, Vivien Chartres. The resultant book is a handful of reminiscences embellished by the imagination, chapters of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, feminine to the core, yet stripped bare of sentimentality, written in the same delicious Italian as the Preface, with such verve, such *brio*, such gaiety and humour, that those satisfying little ripples of laughter sweep over the reader who sits enjoying them alone by his fire which are usually the tributes only to spoken wit. They are familiar and incidental enough to be journalism, their constant inclination towards a daintily reckless exaggeration perhaps is journalism, but the exaggeration is at once effortless and perfectly conscious, that is, like everything else about these easy, agreeable papers, it is artistic. Their author has escaped somehow the perils of precocity; Carmen's girlish caprices might so easily have survived into middle-aged archness, but from such disaster Mrs. Chartres had her humour to preserve her.

These haphazard chapters have many of the qualities of good English prose, and one can hardly avoid wondering whether they do not owe something to the fact that Annie Vivanti learned to write her prose in English; "The Devourers," and at least one of the pa-



pers in "*Zingaresca*," the one on Carducci, she wrote first in English and then translated. However that may be, she has produced in "*Zingaresca*" an Italian book that is like no other Italian book; it has humour which owes nothing to the fantastic or the ironic; not a little of its fun is at the author's own expense; it is sophisticated and yet spontaneous; it offers us a woman's view of things, delivered by an artist who is a woman of the world and a poet. The things are not many, it is true, nor profound, but they are shown to us shimmering through the transforming medium of an artist's personality. "*Zingaresca*" recounts only a few episodes selected out of a life which must be able to yield a rich harvest of them yet, a life which can have held few if any dull moments, and some of the least dull our own country may very well have had the honour of affording her, on a sheep-ranch in the State of Texas. After a chance word spoken at an Italian Embassy dinner in London, "we had taken, John and I, a heroic decision. We realized, or at least I made John realize, how tired we were of our false and conventional everyday life. Oh, to return closer to nature! Oh, to take our way, purified and epical, towards the primitive! . . ."

We decided to abandon everything that up to that day had interested us, literature, journalism, society, art, politics. John was no longer to be a London lawyer, he should raise domestic animals on a ranch in America. Our only uncertainty was as to the nature of the animals.

"Horses," said I, æsthetic-romantic.

"Cattle," said John, practical-positive.

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We agreed by a compromise upon sheep. In sheep John saw wool and excellent mutton chops; I saw snow-white lambs with a blue ribbon about their necks, just like the sacred lithographs. Oh, the dear sheep! My fancy was captured and ravished by them. It is true that for me they were nothing but a pretext, a scenario. What really seduced me was the thought of the great solitudes, the untamed life, new and untried.

During all the Atlantic crossing, and in the train from New York to Chicago, I made every effort to persuade John to allow me to receive my first impression of the great solitudes of the Far West, alone, without witness. I reminded him that I had gone into my seventh edition, I talked of the sacred right of the Poet to be alone, face to face for the first time with the grandiose elements of nature, without being distracted by the presence of others.

With great difficulty I succeeded in touching if not in convincing him. And so it happened that I alighted alone on that rainy March morning in New City, Texas, with a letter in my pocket to Christopher Ruddy, the great sheep-raiser, and in my memory my husband's promise not to come on from Chicago with our little Vivien to rejoin me, until two days later. Unless I should telephone.

It is a great temptation to transcribe the next twenty pages, which relate with unequalled gaiety the comic epic of the succeeding twenty-four hours at Ruddy's ranch. At the end of them, the poetess who had longed for the great solitudes was back at the wooden hut which constituted the whole of New City, Texas, asking the telephone operator for long-distance connection with Chicago.

## GUIDO GOZZANO'S BOOK OF YOUTH

IT MIGHT be an interesting speculation in minor æsthetics to determine what distance of time is required to make a past epoch picturesque. It is arguable that it takes just four generations. We know that the fashions of the immediately preceding generation are nearly always odious, whether in clothing or house-decoration, in philanthropy or poetry; and this means that our grandfather's day is almost as bad as our father's, since we grow up with the latter's disparagements in our ears. But throw it back one generation further, and impatience and derision give way to sentiment; we find our great-grandmother charming, whether she wear hoops or Empire high-waists, basques or even balloon sleeves—though this last is harder to believe, since these are not great-grandmother's as yet. Her furniture and her ideas are as acceptable as her styles; what was lamentable to her children has become, to her great-grandchildren, quaint. Absolving difference, which she does not live to see!

But we may live long enough to see rehabilitated the generation that preceded our own; our grandchildren will be its fourth generation, they will find all its ways adorable, and as they begin to say so in artistic verse

and prose, they will teach us a valuable lesson in the relativity of taste. People in middle life can already see their grandfather's generation putting on a literary halo in the verse of the newest poets, and the newest poets may look to see their children read Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, and relegate painted furniture once more to the attic.

It is the same with centuries; your only tolerable century is the one before last. The eighteenth held in elegant contempt the wild rich seventeenth which the nineteenth steeped itself in; the nineteenth, which loved efflorescence and spontaneity, detested the chill formalities of the Age of Reason, and could endure nothing about the eighteenth except the fact that it blew up in the French Revolution and the Romantic Movement. Now the twentieth feels as it does feel about the Victorian era, and designs Adam rooms and writes "Jennifer Lorn."

In the pages of the "Yellow Book," Max Beerbohm, by a *tour de force* of his imagination, once described the year 1880 in the language of the fourth generation, investing the fads and follies of that period with the charm of an elder day. He hung a curtain of words, impalpable as the modern stage-manager's gauze, between his reader and the Jersey Lily, between his reader and "blue china . . . and the poet Swinburne," and with the artificial distance they took on the atmosphere of romance. Just so, if we live to be old enough, the youngest poet will give us back our youth, seen

through the glamorous atmosphere of the past. A little out of focus it will look, though, for what was natural and matter-of-course to us, the only right and simple thing, will be "periodic" to him. We shall not quite like that.

Italians who were young in 1848, and who lived to be old—like the Emperor Francis Joseph, who had his own memories of the *Quarantotto* from his side of the shield—had the strange and rather beguiling experience of seeing their lost youth through the eyes of a sentimentalizing posterity, when Guido Gozzano, a poet who certainly had little sentiment left for his own times, published his "Colloquies" in 1911. He was twenty-five before he had finished them, as he tells us in several poems as carefully dated as certain of Petrarch's sonnets, and the book is a veritable book of youth. He sees most things through the golden haze of literary association, as youth does. The name Carlotta on the back of an old photograph sets him dreaming of Foscolo and "Jacopo Ortis"; he heads a group of his poems with a phrase of Petrarch's, *il giovenile errore*; the moon seen above a village *campanile* translates into Italian for his imagination Musset's huge romantic dotted "i"; a love-affair with a little maid-servant beguiles his fastidiousness because he can fancy himself to be living a tale out of the "Decameron"; provincial Turin, where he grew up, is glorified for him as soon as he recollects the narrow-minded Recanati where Leopardi lived his tragic childhood;

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the hour of sunset there reminds him of Massimo d'Azeglio's *Ricordi*, and he regrets that he was born too late for the *Risorgimento*.

But while he borrows thus the robes of poesy to deck out his own life, he returns good measure by throwing a veil of poetic association over a time and place that had not yet begun to seem romantic—the Turin of 1850. That period has been reflected in so many memoirs of persons still living, or living not long since, that it seems very recent background to any but the latest comer. For Guido Gozzano it wears the tender grace of a day that is dead.

An old photograph-album with her name in it, dated 1848, evokes his great-grandmother's *salotto* hung with crimson damask, with its bust of Alfieri, its views of Venice executed in mosaics, its faded daguerreotypes and water-colours, its great chandelier hung with prisms like a Christmas-tree, its little boxes made of shells with "Remember" on their covers, its marble fruit under a glass bell—

The nice old things in execrable taste

—and peoples it for his imagination with his great-grandmother's refined guests making fashionable talk about the soprano of La Scala who was growing too fat for *Ernani*, of the new operatic success, *Rigoletto*, of Radetzsky and the Armistice and the ugly but *simpatico* visage of the young King Charles Albert, of Mazzini, and the *salon* of the Countess Maffei. There are people living who may have been taken as children



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into that drawing-room, to be politely petted and kissed, and to catch the well-bred undertones of that talk, but seen through Guido Gozzano's young eyes it is all as remote as an eighteenth-century vignette.

Still, the book of his youth is not given wholly to resuscitating the past, he does not live only through literature, though he suffers from that psychic malady of the literary artist which makes him often seem to himself like two men, one who lives and one who watches his double live. The *blasé* young poet has had many loves to recount by the time he is twenty-five, though none that went deep. He is still seeking the real love, the great love, and deploring his own incapacity for emotion. There is a moment when he seems to feel something more real, in a sympathetic inclination for the country maiden Felicita, who welcomes him modestly every day to her father's ancient villa in the hill-town where he is sojourning for his health—a villa where the *marchesa's* ghost is sometimes seen to walk, and “which wears a garment of growing corn waist-high about it, like a seventeenth-century lady masquerading as a peasant girl”; but his mocking literary self is on the watch to warn him, as he says farewell, that if he takes it too seriously he will be cutting a figure like a lover in one of Prati's ballads—

The man of other days, the Young Romantic,  
Which I am not and but pretend to be.

Yet he has something of the Young Romantic in him

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for all that, this young gentleman in his early twenties who sees himself as cold, intellectual and inaccessible, beset with loving women whom he does not love, yet holding to a belief in Love itself, with a capital letter. To be so blasé, so selfconscious, so fearful of a bit of sentiment, is to be engagingly youthful.

But love and literature are part of every young poet's life, and while Guido Gozzano reveals them through the glaring clear white glass of his twentieth-century temperament, with that touch of acridity characteristic of present-day youth, he is most interesting when he describes those aspects of his life which he shares with no other. When he said good-bye to Felicita that day, and watched his double,

*Qui me ressemblait comme un frère,*

playing the romantic lover, it was on the eve of departure for some soft climate—Morocco, or the islands of the South Atlantic—which should heal his ailing lungs; and he gets some very striking effects out of this experience, with his belief that there is no difference between the language of poetry and the language of conversation, and that everything is matter for verse—*tout ce qu'il y a dans la nature est dans l'art*. It is "new" poetry, realistic poetry, the poetry of "actuality" in both the French and the English senses; it seeks not to produce beauty, but to report the facts. Yet the facts, when worked into the patterns of rhyme and metre, take on a beauty they would not have in prose. They get the distance upon them needed to make them

## GUIDO GOZZANO'S BOOK OF YOUTH

“compose,” as when we step back to see an impressionist picture across a width of museum floor.

## ON THE THRESHOLD

**I**

My heart, little lad full of mirth, whose laughter breaks even  
 through tears,  
 My heart, but an urchin in years, so happy to live on this  
 earth.

Shut close in your niche softly napping, you hear, I am sure,  
on strange mission,  
Someone at your door who keeps tapping and tapping?—It  
is the physician.

He taps me in rhythmic notation; he holds, I know not on  
what quest,  
 To the front and the back of my chest, machinery of  
auscultation.

Now what does he hear, the old faker? They almost would  
move me to laughter,  
His airs of a skilful wiseacre, were it not for the bill to  
come after.

"I catch a slight whisper away on the apex—not much, just  
a clue,"  
And with his ridiculous crayon he draws a small circle of  
blue.

“High feeding, no more versifying, no more of your ‘white  
nights’ passed waking,  
No more cigarettes, no love-making—some climate that’s  
drier, less trying,

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San Remo perhaps, or Rapallo—no depression, take things  
with a laugh.  
Then, if you permit, we shall follow our search with the  
radiograph."

### II

O heart, do you not perhaps mark, O heart—and with what  
perturbation!  
Through your house so well shuttered and dark there flashes  
an illumination?

There flows through my thorax a fluid, through all its parts,  
lower and higher,  
And painlessly shown, darker-hued against a bright back-  
ground of fire,

My bones and my organs it weaves—as lightning will paint  
on the night  
A skeleton woodland of light—in patterns of branches and  
leaves.

And what does he see, the old faker? They almost would  
move me to laughter,  
His airs of a skilful wiseacre, were it not for the bill to  
come after.

### III

My heart, little lad full of mirth, whose laughter breaks even  
through tears,  
My heart, but an urchin in years, so happy to live on this  
earth,

## GUIDO GOZZANO'S BOOK OF YOUTH

O heart, my suspicion is keen (for your sake alone I spend  
breath  
In grieving), there draws nigh that Queen whom mortals  
denominate Death. . . .

A Lady with no shape or form, a Lady in nothingness dressed,  
Wherever her cold fingers rest, she touches things but to  
transform.

You'll feel, heart, well-being throughout, a light load, without  
pain or care,  
You'll waken quite altered without—in name and in face and  
in hair.

You'll waken *in corpore sano*, to feel yourself different,  
unremembered,  
The colloquies no more remembered you held with that  
*guidogozzano*. . . .

He came back cured, as he believed, from his ultimate island, and settled quietly in a remote villa, "with a sick mother, a white-haired great-aunt, and a demented uncle," his only other companions being puss, a hoarse-voiced jay, and a Barbary ape named Makakita. As he says in his vigorous *martelliano* verses, the fourteen-syllabled lines with marked cæsura, of which this is a rude imitation:

With its neglected garden, its vast saloons, its fine  
Seventeenth-century balconies, the vine-hung villa looks  
As though it had been taken from certain poems of mine,  
It looks the typical villa out of the story-books.

## ITALIAN SILHOUETTES

The villa, sad, is thinking, thinking of better days,  
Gay groups beneath the trees there, yonder, centuries old,  
Resplendent banquets served in great dining-halls ablaze,  
Balls in the ball-room, stripped now of spoils the dealers sold.

But where in other days the Ansaldis used to come,  
Rattazzis, Casa Oddone, d'Azeglios, it is said,  
There stops to-day a motor, panting, with throbbing hum,  
And bearded foreign folk lift the knocker's Gorgon head. . . .

Here, in his hermitage,

A veteran from the fields of Love and Death,  
Two lovely things which both have lied to him,

he worked in his laboratory and wrote verses. A true young modern, it is science which can console him for the disappointments of love and religion, and for his reprieve from death.

Ah! Nature is not blind and deaf and mute;  
I question flint and lichen, and I hear  
Her speak her purposes, benign and clear.  
Born of herself, herself is absolute,  
The only truth that has no norm to suit:  
Before her face I have to drop my sneer.

Indeed he took his poet's note-book into the laboratory with him sometimes, and experimented a little with scientific poetry; crystals, chrysalids and retorts intrude strangely here and there upon amorous reminiscence.

At the end of his book, still living a companioned hermit in his villa, Guido Gozzano was still twenty-five. He looked over the brink of his youth into the gulf of



GUIDO GOZZANO'S BOOK OF YOUTH  
increasing age, to discern "thirty, turbid with moribund  
instincts," "forty, terrifying age of the defeated," then  
old age, and decided not to let this dismal procession  
of the years fly the banner of poesy. Himself will  
close youth's manuscript:

## THE COLLOQUIES

### I

"The Colloquies."—Restored now, lithe and tanned,  
He takes his verses, files them, makes them chime,  
Poises his manuscript upon his hand.

—This trivial game of syllable and rhyme:  
Is this the whole here of my youth's short lease?  
Is this all there is left of fleeting time?

Better be silent now, better to cease,  
While still my garden-wall with flowers is hung,  
Now before envy learns to hold her peace.

Better to stop half-way, while still I'm young,  
Now while the world to my unskilful Muse,  
As to the songstress singing her first song,

Its friendly right hand will not yet refuse.

### II

Unlike the actress getting on in years,  
My Muse shall never smirk or ape young ways,  
Derided by the crowd which sneering hears.

But like that lovely Countess of old days,  
The Castiglione, shut within her walls,  
My Muse grown mute, still young, shall cease her lays,

## ITALIAN SILHOUETTES

And disappear before her beauty falls—  
Like her who sealed her doors, still in her prime,  
To live a prisoner in her own halls,

Among her faded stuffs, alone with Time,  
Mirrorless, friendless, waiting her last day,  
Hiding from court and people, like a crime,

The last humiliation of decay.

### III

I wish my image ever to remain,  
As in a portrait, twenty-one or -two.  
My friends, you shall not see me on the wane,

Bent with the years, shaking, forlorn of hue.  
But keeping mute, I still shall seem that youth,  
A trifle hare-brained, who was dear to you. . . .

Needless precaution! By the time Guido Gozzano reached the dreaded thirties, it was not only on his hot young instincts that death had set the seal. The vanquished forties he did not even approach. Before he died in 1916, he had written several other books—fables, short stories, travel sketches—but his self-denying ordinance against more verses was never violated.

## THE POET IN PAPINI

IN THE spring of 1904, William James was at Rome attending some philosophical gathering, and wrote to his family with his usual gusto about an afternoon spent with Giovanni Papini and his little band of young Florentine pragmatists. Much astonished and touched he had been, to learn that the "very serious philosophic movement" which they were carrying on "with an enthusiasm and also a literary swing and activity that I know nothing of in our own land," was largely inspired by himself. He kept close track thereafter of Papini's writings, and two years later was exclaiming in a letter to his friend and brother-pragmatist Schiller of Oxford: "Papini is a jewel! To think of that little Dago putting himself ahead of every one of us at a single stride! And what a writer! and what fecundity! and what courage (careless of nicknames, for it is so easy to call him now the Cyrano de Bergerac of philosophy)! and what humour, and what truth!" It is long since Papini was a pragmatist; he has been several things since then, including now, as it appears, a gospel Christian, but James's characterization of the writer still holds good: "what fecundity, what courage, what humour, what truth!" Only he should have added: "and what ferocity!"

Papini was born in Florence in 1881, but he never, he says, had what could be called a childhood. Always a solitary spirit, he was a fierce, suspicious, unpopular little boy, whom even his relatives did not know how to be fond of, lamenting that he was not like other children, and laughing at him for a queer little old man. He possesses a photograph of a pale, ugly, nervous small boy, which his mother avers to be a portrait of him at the age of seven. "It is the only evidence I have that I was ever a child." The most important influence upon his spirit in those early days, save always that of books, was the quiet Tuscan landscape which he trudged over on long Sunday excursions with his father.

But the books were harder to come by. The great day of his childhood was when he was given the run of his father's library, which consisted of an old rustic hamper into which had been carelessly tumbled about a hundred shabby volumes. "This basket was kept in a small out-of-the-way room at the back of the house which overlooked the neighbouring roofs. It was the Alhambra of my fancy and contained a little of everything, firewood, discarded garments, rat-traps, sparrow-cages, a rifle, and a badly stained Garibaldi red shirt with an 1860 medal pinned on its front. There I would shut myself up every day, as soon as I was free, and draw out, one by one, the forgotten books. Unbound volumes, unmatched, greasy, stained by the flies and the pigeons, all of them torn and broken, but how

rich and generous for me with surprises, marvels and promises!" These were soon exhausted, and the problem of his boyhood was how to get more. The family was poor in those days, "a decent middle-class poverty that did not mean hunger or cold, yet I suffered atrociously from it, and have always hated, even to this day, those who were born to full pocket-books." To put a scanty penny or two into his own, he resorted to all kinds of shifts. Out of the two *soldi* a day that they gave him for his school lunch, he saved one; his mother by unspeakable economies managed to spare him three or four per week out of the household money; sometimes, he confesses, he would keep back part of the change when he was sent to do errands. These meagre savings he never spent on anything but paper and pens, ink and books. "The proprietors of the book-stalls had no love for me, knowing that I had only a few farthings to spend, and that I would stand as long as they would permit me, thumbing and skimming their wares, to buy at last only one or two picked-over incomplete volumes." The day came when Papini learned that there was such a place as a public library, with "a million books" where he might go and read his fill when he should be sixteen, and he contrived to cheat the authorities by two years, choosing on the first occasion a translation of the complete works of Darwin, so they should not imagine that he was frivolous or immature. "Then I threw myself head first into all the books my curiosity suggested, setting out without experience,

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without a guide, without a plan, but with all the fury of passion, upon the hard and magnificent road of omniscience."

It is painful to an admirer of Papini, who is trying to reproduce and communicate the effect he has left upon one mind, to remember how he affects to despise the art of criticism. "If I have spoken well," he exclaims, "why do you have to come and say it over after me—less well? Why try to make people understand what I have said, instead of kindling your own spirit to outdo and destroy me?" If one sought to remind Papini that, after all, a bulky share of his own four-and-twenty volumes are works of criticism, he could truly reply that he seeks only to outdo and destroy, and is little concerned with trying to make the world understand what any other writer means. We are absolved, at any rate, from trying to be fair to Papini, for he bothers his head not at all about being fair to others. In the article, for instance, which he amiably entitles "The Imbecilities of Croce," he tears out of their context not only single sentences, but half-sentences, tail-ends of sentences, and sets them all alone on a page, with a number attached and surrounded by wide spaces of white paper; and it must be confessed that the famous Neapolitan does not survive this treatment with any great dignity.

The new psychology, whatever its gifts to humanity and to our knowledge of ourselves, has certainly impoverished our speech. It has made us afraid, for



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example, to use the word "genius" any more. By explaining away some of the differences between men and disparaging others, it has taught us to believe that "genius" is a politer synonym for either a lunatic or a cheated lover. Yet the word remains a convenient symbol to describe a certain overflowing kind of nature, which has more of all the human gifts than others have, and has them more intensely; and Papini, irritating, challenging, teasing, provocative, "aggravating" spirit that he is, whom his elders especially would be glad to ignore or laugh out of court for his bad manners, it is yet difficult not to call a man of genius. It is the only thing we could call him, we may be sure, that he himself would not take offence at.

Papini's story of his inner life he relegates among his works of fiction, and this transparent evasion is probably the only act of his which could ever have been called ingenuous. *Un uomo finito*, a title which its author repents of and repudiates in the closing chapters, as well he might, being then only thirty-one, might have been called "The Making of a Man of Genius." He has that power of recollecting his own life, for one thing, which Robert Louis Stevenson believed the one indispensable gift of the literary creator. He has the Gargantuan appetite for life and learning, which gave him at the age of ten the simple ambition to know everything—*tutto*—and started him at fifteen upon the enterprise of writing an encyclopædia which, unlike all others, should be complete. Then he has the ferocious

individualism of genius—"there was I," he says, "and there was the Universe," antagonists, rivals, and not, as he seems to have felt, unequal—together with a kind of excess, exaggeration, emphasis, exuberance, which makes every human experience more new, more interesting, when it happens to him. Even when he is scolding at life most angrily, he still communicates the sense of life intensely. It is energy and enthusiasm, not disillusionment, which can utter the challenge, "Whatever be the government of the world, I am in the opposition." And always, whatever mood or truth masters him at the moment (and he is, as a London reviewer once said, "the kind of man who will take up a view that appeals to him, give it a full rhetorical working-out, and then, perhaps, forget all about it")—always he has, as Victor Hugo had, and every other genius, the serene security of being right. And he is ever and always an evangelist. When his lust for universality made him as a boy desire *tout simplement* to know everything, he conceived his Encyclopædia, as Dante long ago his *Convivio*, so as to put that knowledge at the disposal of all men; later, when his ambition soared still higher, and he aspired to all moral as well as intellectual superiority, when he set out to be God, to *indiarsi*, in Dante's word, he determined and strove to raise up all men with him, willynilly, cauterizing and scarifying as his mission might require; at last, when disenchantment caught him, and he conceived a sudden loathing of human life, he set himself just as diligently to communicate his sickness and

nausea to all mankind, to spread in all seriousness the gospel of universal suicide.

An excessive man, but thorough! A man all impatience and irritability, who enjoys his loves less than his hates. His hates are for Benedetto Croce, all professors and academies, the self-styled poetry of Guido Mazzoni, the historical drama, Sem Benelli, and patriotic verse. His loves are less warm. Dante and Leonardo and Michael Angelo he always has a good word for, Carducci nearly always, D'Annunzio seldom; he has a true feeling for the sensitive lyricism of Pascoli; and lest he be accused, as indeed he accuses D'Annunzio, of being unable to praise any but the dead, and of the dead preferably those who have been so the longest, he speaks with sincere admiration of Panzini and Ardengo Soffici, of Palazzeschi and Guido Gozzano.

It is superfluous to criticize Papini's faults, for he has pointed them all out himself first; it is part of that omniscience, which he recognized at the outset to be his province, that he shall be unaware of nothing that we could possibly tell him. So to accuse his want of fairness will be no surprise to him. "There is not an impartial page in this book," he says in the preface to one volume; "these essays are all passionate, partial and subjective," in the preface to another. It would be easy to point out contradictions in his pages, but here again he has forestalled us. I contradict myself? he says, in effect, with Whitman; very well, I contradict myself. Thus, while he is, like Bernard Shaw, a man who frankly revels in being all brain, yet he

pretends, at least, to value action above thought, and disparages the Renaissance as a time when the sword gave way to the pen, the builder to the humanist, creative power to the resurrection and imitation of the past. By patronizing the past, he seeks to aggrandize the present and strike off its fetters of tradition, yet he is himself a man of learning, heavily in debt to the centuries. Of his good qualities he is equally well aware. Two he has whose frequent absence from Italian literature the foreigner must lament—that irony which plays like an initiated smile just under the surface of French prose, and the rich humane humour of the English essay—yet before one can set down one's gratitude to Papini for these very gifts, he has taken the words out of one's mouth; in the preface to *Buffonate* he writes that "in a country where humour is not understood, and wit comes at second hand from Paris," he hopes to offer his ideas and problems "clothed with humour *in the English sense*."

But with no wish to argue with him or convict him, which would indeed be rash, it is the poet we are looking for in this man of truculence and erudition. That erudition is not the foe of lyricism, Dante and Leopardi are quick to prove, but can truculence and polemics, insolence and defiance and shameless exultation over routed adversaries, combine to make a lyric poet? Papini, so free with the history of his mind, conceals the story of his emotions, yet emotion is the very food and flesh of poetry; he likes best to puzzle and shock,

not to be divined and loved, yet to write lyric verse is to bare the soul. For Papini to write it, is for the deadliest of stone-throwers to move into a glass house.

As for style, Papini's prose sounds oftenest like the conversation of a brilliant man in a great hurry; and he is richly allusive, leaving his pages strewn with the most unexpected and apposite phrases snatched from all the poets, to which he never pauses to put quotation marks. But we must not be deceived by the appearance of haste. Papini's intelligence is exquisitely conscious, and he is an artist to the marrow of his bones; depend upon it, though he seems to flash along his road like a shooting star, as headlong and as bright, every negligent coruscation has been calculated to a nicety of candle-power. He makes bold to condemn over-emphasis in others, but himself speaks nearly always at the top of his voice, with a heaped-up, abounding, overflowing vocabulary which is anything but unemphatic, and frequently not a little coarse. "No delicacy, I warn you, gentlemen," he remarks somewhere, "will ever slip from my pen as it runs across the page." His native woodnote is a wild, triumphant cackle. He can be when he likes as Rabelaisian as a Renaissance Italian or a latter-day Irishman, and the modern Muse of criticism, wonted to the polite sobrieties of academic speech, must feel as embarrassed at times by the language Papini puts into her mouth, as the refined patient coming out from under the influence of the anæsthetic, who finds herself uttering words which surprise her. We cannot imagine such a *prosa-*

teur wielding the poet's pen—or any pen. It must be the office typewriter, the one which evidently invented the title of Ardengo Soffici's celebrated book, *Bifşzf + 18*, that we hear spitting and clattering away in Papini's deafening staccato.

Yet now and then even in his polemic prose we come upon a page of beautiful eloquence, as when he tenderly champions a misunderstood genius like Nietzsche, or an unappreciated one like Alfredo Oriani, or pays a tribute of affection to a dead soldier of letters, like Renato Serra.

The truth is, of course, that the cackle expresses only half of Papini, that the controversialist, the "terrible infant," the peril of the serious-minded, is *doublé* with a poet, and as usual he is beforehand with us in drawing attention to the fact. In *Un uomo finito*, which he refers to elsewhere as "the most intense and most important of my books" (a phrase he would to-day reserve, no doubt, for the *Storia di Cristo*), he analyses himself and his double: "I am at moments a poor sentimentalist, ready to shed tears at the first notes of a Viennese waltz coming from behind closed shutters out of a tortured pianoforte, or a child, overflowing with affection. . . . At others, I become the wild wolf of Hobbes, with fangs eager to bite and tear. . . . I am both lyrical and cynical, a fantastic and a sceptic, a destroyer and a poet."

All of these personages reveal themselves in his prose, especially in the short stories and tales, those imaginative and original inventions in the realm of



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fantastic psychology, from the lady novelist in *Parole e sangue* ("Words and Blood") who was fatally constrained to live out in her own person all the vicissitudes of her unhappy heroines, until the death of the last one carried her off, or the man in the *Pilota cieco* ("The Blind Pilot") who accomplished his suicide by a mere act of will, to the scientist in *Buffonate* ("Buffooneries") who is to rid mankind of its wasteful and ridiculous habit, or rather malady, of sleep.

And there are still several other things to be learned of Papini the poet before we leave his prose. First, we know that for him poetry means the lyric, "that poetry which is absolutely poetic and intimately alive." Even Shakespeare he believes will not long survive our growing distaste for dramatic verse, there is not enough pure lyricism in him to outsoar the puerilities of storytelling. Then, from the balanced arrangement of even his controversial writings, we may deduce an extreme consciousness of form; we have to go back to the *Vita Nuova* to find such symmetry in prose. Having set out upon his polemics with his famous "Four and Twenty Minds," the studies in the two related volumes, *Stronature* ("Slashings") and *Testimonianze*, must likewise number twenty-four each; *Un uomo finito* is divided into half a hundred papers, grouped into six movements like a monster symphony—*andante*, *appassionato*, *tempestoso*, *solenne*, *lentissimo*, *allegretto*. From the paper in which he flays alive poor Guido Mazzoni, professor and bibliographer, for having ventured to call a volume of his *Poesie*, we learn what poetry must

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not be; it must not be imitative, derivative, "literary," it dare not be mediocre, and it must avoid like the pestilence those conventional counters of poetic diction which always appear in couples like tedious pairs of Siamese twins—the "noble steed," the "starry vault," the "flowery meadow," the "pallid moon"—which were old to the oldest of the Arcadians; while from the one on Soffici we see what Papini would like it to be: "sound, colour, form, mood, a complex reflected image, an immense net of suggestions and reminiscences."

But it is time to look at Papini's own poetry. The volumes he groups under *Lirica* are three: *Opera prima*, which, whatever he may have meant by the title, was far from being his first work; *Cento pagine di poesia* (in prose); and *Giorni di festa* ("Feast-Days"), so named, as the author explains in a rare moment of goodwill, because poetry, whatever it costs him in labour and pain, is always a *festa* to the poet. These books were all published, and mostly written, in war-time, during "the years of Mars and Tubalcain," but there is no whir of an airplane's wing to be heard in them, no rumble of a distant drum.

The *Opera prima*, which was not the first of them, consists of exactly twenty lyrics in rhyme, and twenty minute discourses in prose which state a definite theory of poetry. The theory can be reduced almost to one word, the word Papini calls the key to real and vital Futurism as distinguished from mere faddishness, the word "originality." By this he does not mean any easy novelty of subject-matter to be inexpensively

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achieved by substituting in verse dynamos for waterfalls, a café for a mountain-top, an electric sign for the moon, nor yet the still cheaper novelty of externals, such as anarchy of syntax or eccentricities of print. Such oddities he feels only mask an inward emptiness and nullity, a want of real originality; true liberty achieves power only within limits, like the wild waters of the cascade within the pipes of the hydro-electric plant. The originality Papini desires is one which "conveys a sensibility," intellectual, moral or emotional, "by means of a renewed poetic vocabulary." The poet's only subject-matter is the human soul; logic and narration are alike impertinence, the external world enters only as it accompanies, expresses or embellishes a state of mind. Since verse must by its very nature and origin be musical, Papini has no doubt that regular metre helps to make it so, and rhyme—rhyme, which comes to him, so he says, of itself, and often compels unexpected felicities and novelties of diction. And diction, in a certain sense, is all of poetry.

But since nearly all words have unfortunately been used before, originality of diction becomes almost impossible. The ideal would be that every new poet should have a new language entirely to himself; failing this, he must create one, if not altogether new at least unusual and unworn, and for achieving it Papini lays down a set of rules definite enough to recall the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* or the *Deffense et Illustration*. The poet should choose: common words, but taken in a sense that is uncommon; common words rendered al-

most unrecognizable by unexpected prefixes or suffixes—new words, that is, fabricated out of old elements; obsolete words; and (in accord with De Amicis's *Idioma gentile*, which Croce sought to demolish) words drawn from foreign tongues, dialects geographical and social, slang, and the various jargons of the arts and trades. Then he should reverse the present proportion of usual to unusual words, and use as few of the former as possible. If the poetry written on this system is understood of but few, that does not signify for Papini, because true poetry, even that composed of the commonest words, is rarely understood of more.

The last sentence of this diminutive treatise, while assuring us that in the twenty lyrics which precede it there is not a word or a phrase without its rigorous meaning, maliciously suggests that the reader turn back to Page 1 and reread the first poem. The foreigner, at any rate, must do so, not once but several times, dictionary in hand; then certain of the poems will reward him by yielding up their mood with beauty, others will remain obscure, awaiting their destined few. Nearly all of them defy translation by reason of their strained vocabulary full of neologisms.

The other two volumes of Papini's *Lirica* seem to have no connection with the twenty small discourses, but to have been written in accordance with a more liberal poetic theory, in accordance, perhaps, with this fine description of the poet's calling, to be found in the *Uomo finito*: "In a world where everybody is thinking only of eating and earning, of amusing himself

and giving orders to others, there ought to be every now and then somebody to renew our vision of things, to make us feel the mystery within their banality, the beauty in the ashes, the extraordinary in the ordinary."

In the first place, all but one of these pieces are in prose. Then the vocabulary, like a good uncle in a story-book, is rich but not eccentric, and the subject-matter includes persons and places as well as states of mind. *Giorni di festa* is an assemblage of small meditative paragraphs something on the order of "Trivia"; the "Hundred Pages of Poetry" are frankly personal, about the poet's house, his wife, his children, his tastes. His retreat in the Tuscan hills is described almost in the spirit of the *Santa verde*; like Govoni's poetical solitary, Papini flees the life of towns and the society of men, to take refuge in the country and the companionship of friendly beasts. He sounds almost simple, almost kind. Then he tells us what the creatures are that he prefers to his fellow-Florentines; they are a snake, a frog, and a scorpion, and we catch the *florentino spirito bizzarro* flashing his malign smile at us from between the lines, although he does not say a word.

But many of the prose poems in these two books are not at all demonic, and certainly few poems in either prose or verse could more beautifully "reveal the mystery within banality, the extraordinary within the ordinary," than Papini's page of prose which he calls "My River" and which describes the Arno where it flows through his city of Florence on its way from the Casentino to the islands of Capraia and Gorgona:

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To come into town from the country is like shutting oneself up in the house again after a couple of hours in the open air, stirred and freshened by the wind. And indeed the city is like a huge house, crossed and cut through by uncovered corridors, whose ceilings are a little higher than those of the rooms where we eat and sleep, and change their tints at the pleasure of sun and cloud. The whole city is a house, it smells stuffy and reeks tremendously of human life. It is a great encampment, grown old and petrified, a molehill of rocks and bricks wickedly laid upon the deserted free spaces of the fields. Inside it, even the trees, tranquil within their garden-walls and court-yards, are as if copied from those we see in the wings of the theatres; the flowers in the city parks which survive the winter have a hardness of form and colour like those painted tin ones which hang upon the gravestones of "excellent fathers snatched from us by cruel illness."

The only bit of natural nature left in the city is the river. To emerge from some dubious alley or elegant avenue upon the Lungarno is like coming out of doors again; one finds a wider stretch of sky and a dark mountain unspotted by white houses. Yet even the river has suffered on its passage through the town. Along its banks of good earth, where the frogs used to snap off the soft purple stems of the daisies, there once flourished grasses and osiers, reeds and poplars. Now they have imprisoned it between two long walls like a wild creature, lest it overflow its banks and frighten the shopkeepers and wet the ladies' skirts. There are no more gulfs or inlets or curves. As long as it is passing through the city, among well-bred worthy folk, the river must keep to a straight path, like a truant boy held fast by his master's iron wrist. And in recompense we augment its waters by pouring into them all the offscourings from our drains, all the subterranean filth and secret refuse of the town, and at night we kindle lights from one end of it to the other, lest it miss its road in the dark.



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Yet, despite all these offences, straitjacketings and soilings, a river is always a river, that water is real water, it comes from the mountains and the heavens and it goes to the sea. In spite of all we can do, this great current . . . which unites across the fearsome dullness of the plain that which is loftiest with that which is deepest, the mountains with the sea, can still give us a sense of freshness, of power, of liberty.

By writing the "Hundred Pages of Poetry," Papini has delivered a kind of critical judgment upon the *Opera prima*, and for once an unconscious and involuntary one. For if he writes what most poetry-lovers will feel to be better poetry when he is not thinking about his theory, that fact must teach us to give the theory a doubtful welcome.

## ADA NEGRI

IT HAS almost ceased to be the rule for women to demand that their works of art be judged as if they were men's. That they be judged with equal severity, this indeed they do require, and are coming nearer perhaps than heretofore to getting; but fewer women now than fifty years ago would choose that their work should be mistaken for that of a man, or care to adopt a masculine pseudonym, like George Eliot and George Sand, in the hope that it might be. It is well, perhaps, that women are thus developing a kind of class consciousness which enables them to face with more equanimity the charge that this or that is "just like a woman," for it is hard to see why it should be intrinsically more fortunate that a woman's book should be mistaken for a man's than an Englishman's for a Russian's. Point of view contributes elements of its own to a work of art, and a woman's must necessarily be different in some respects from a man's. If she never expresses it honestly for herself, how is the one half of the world to learn how the other half lives?

The Italian poetess who is best known to-day outside of her own country did not, however, begin by expressing woman as distinct from man. Her earliest book was not the voice of a woman, but the cry of a class.

Such poetry was new to Italian literature, although there has seldom been a period of its history when some poetry has not been political. Most Italian poets from Dante to Carducci have diverted a part of their lyric passion from love to politics. The poets of the nineteenth century fought for the independence of Italy with both the pen and the sword, and some of the best Italian poetry must always fail to make its way across the Alps or the Atlantic because it requires such a minute knowledge of Italian history for its better understanding. But the oppression that poets had lamented in beautiful verse heretofore had been the weight of the foreigner's heel; the bitter cry of the poor had not been heard. Ada Negri's early poems, on the other hand, while they seemed to speak in the well-remembered voice of the old Lombard spirit of revolt which Barbarossa had heard lifted against him, and which spoke against the Austrian in the bloody Five Days of Milan, were railing at no political oppressor, but at the more impersonal cruelties of the social order. It was in the early nineties that they began to be heard, when readers of the well-known evening paper of Milan, *Il Corriere della sera*, experienced a gathering curiosity as to the authorship of certain fiery little poems that appeared in it from time to time. They bore the short and non-committal signature of Ada Negri, and uttered the complaint of oppressed industry. They sang, in rather rough, stirring verses, the wretchedness of the helpless and the poor, of the old and the beaten; they described the long miseries of un-

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employment, mutilated hands of factory women, the workman broken by his work, the vagabond who never knew a home and who lies at last beneath the stranger's dissecting-knife, the bewildered family of evicted tenants whose humble goods confess their paucity and pitiful domestic shifts too frankly to the daylight.

Nothing was known of the writer, save what could be pieced together out of the scanty bits of information scattered through these poems. It was a woman, so much was certain. The habit of the Romance tongues, with their gracious feminine adjectives to describe the feminine moiety of the animate and inanimate world, left no doubt of it, although she did not insist on the point as yet, nor seem to draw any material from it. And she was young:

Mine is youth, and all of life is mine!  
In the mortal struggle,  
None, none shall ever see me once repine.  
High above ruin, above cares and tears,  
Shine out my twenty years!

It could be believed that she lived at Motta-Visconti, a little village of the Lombard plain, on that river Ticino which Charles Albert crossed at the outset of his ill-fated campaign of 1848, because her poems were dated from there; and it was easy to see that she worshipped her mother, who had supported her childhood with the work of her hands.

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While I, a happy child, would softly cower  
Into the pillows, sinking into sleep,  
Bent to her needle evenings, hour by hour,  
My mother watch did keep.

And again, in a poem called "The Factory Mother," we may safely substitute a daughter for the son in the poem, and find another portrait of the poetess's valiant mother.

Her son is at his books. She at the loom  
Pours out her heart's blood without rest or ruth,  
And of her worn old age  
She makes glad sacrifice, as once of youth.

And Ada Negri was brave:

Who's knocking at my door?  
. . . Good day, Misfortune, you'll not frighten me!

But there was the acerbity of youth in her courage.  
Even friendship drew back from her girlish austerity  
that disdained laughter, while love she strove to chill  
and terrify with her pride.

You, who are generous, fair and strong,  
Ask love of me? Nay, cease!  
If fate reserves you hope and song,  
Cast yourself not in my dark path.  
Go, earth is rich in love and peace,  
But I, O Youth, am wrath!

And Ada Negri was ambitious. Conscious of her  
genius, and of a mission, the only lover she sought was

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fame, and in the "Factory Mother's" hopes for her son it is not hard to discern her own ambitions.

Her boy, her only one,  
Her mighty pride through poverty, who now  
On his broad serious brow  
Shows to her hope the flash of genius' sun . . .

Her boy shall study. In her visions bold  
She sees him great and envied, freed from dread,  
And fame for his dark head  
Shall weave a wreath of laurel and of gold.

On her own dark head, no doubt, she and her mother looked to see the future lay a crown, and the indifference of the world moved her impatience.

For all my struggles, though I curse and weep,  
The world goes by and laughs, and hears me not.

Now, thirty years after the appearance of her first verses, comes a vivid, fresh autobiography of Ada Negri's childhood years, *Stella mattutina*, to confirm our conjectures, and make us see her earliest home in the concierge's lodge of a *palazzo* in Lodi, a small provincial city on the Adda. The little household consisted of three women; the brave, laughing, middle-aged mother, who worked thirteen hours a day in a silk-factory for a *lira*-and-a-half a day, and used to read aloud to the aged grandmother every evening, in her girlish voice, melodramatic romances which enthralled and transported the little girl supposed to be safely asleep in the next room; the old grandmother herself,



who was once lady's maid to Grisi, the great *prima donna*, and now as concierge was too old and feeble to open the gate for her master's equipage to pass in and out; and the granddaughter, who had to open it instead, her young heart raging with the sense of unmerited inferiority. One day the brave mother's hand was wounded at her machine, and during the slow days of convalescence, as low funds ran lower and debt showed its menacing face, the desperate girl in her bitterness wrote one of the most poignant of her early poems, "The Hand Caught in the Machinery." The grandmother's death liberated her at last from the hated lodge, and for the rest of her schooldays she lived a life, as she writes long after from the safe shelter of wealth and celebrity, "almost cloistral, almost aristocratic, in its austere poverty. I dwelt with my mother in two small rooms on the third floor of a beautiful house in Corso Roma, overlooking the garden. The little rooms were gleaming with whitewash and cleanliness; from our tiny balconies we could see the vast garden, walled-in like a convent's, all green and silent. . . . My mother used to leave for her workroom at five o'clock in the morning, and would not return till evening. After school hours I used to stay alone with my books, almost always seated on one of the little balconies, facing that green conventual peace. I dreamed and studied much; without friends, without desires, melancholy by temperament, I would pass hours upon hours in absorbed contemplation of the slow course of the sunlight as it crept over the old

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garden's high ivied walls, overspread with climbing roses."

When she first left her studious life of balconied meditation for a noisy roomful of schoolchildren who submitted themselves against their will to their alphabet and ciphering, she was appalled by the shock of the contrast. Yet it was among these rough children, and in sight of the meagre and difficult life their families led, that her human sympathies developed and she came to understand poverty. "When at the age of twenty I wrote 'The Failures' (*I Vinti*), feeling myself fairly encircled, imprisoned and oppressed by the anguish of the suffering many, I wrote in crimson, with the heart's-blood of those who had suffered with my mother and me, the most powerful and the most characteristic of my wild rustic verses."

These early poems, revealing a young, rather crude, intense and honest personality, were gathered at last into a volume called "Fate" (*Fatalità*), and a preface written for it by Signora Sofia Albisi satisfied in part the growing curiosity of the *Corriere's* readers. They learned that the vehement young poetess was a schoolmistress, who had to harness her genius to the humble and fatiguing task of teaching a hundred little children of Motta-Visconti their A B C; that she lived alone with the mother she loved, trudging to the schoolroom each day in wooden shoes; that she had never seen the sea, nor a mountain, nor a city, but had nourished her fires of imagination on books and dreams alone. For books, it appeared, were not lacking. An anonymous

admirer of her verses sent her great parcels of them from Milan by every post, with all the reviews and latest published literary gossip. With her voracity and sure instinct, she happily appropriated what she needed, and based many correct literary judgments on a hint or clue in a book-review. We may not be wrong, indeed, in concluding that she read more book-reviews than books, since there are no traces of reading in her poetry, and its form does not suggest any previous study of a literature in which excellence of form has been supreme. Hers is a poetry of sincerity, of experience, and owes little to poetic tradition.

Cold, I am cold near you, old books severe!

To read *Fatalità* when it was new, was something like reading the first instalment of an autobiographic novel. What would life do to this ardent, candid, young maiden spirit, endowed, it would seem, with great emotional power and sensibility, and the "experiencing nature" which heightens and interprets all personal experience? At any rate, she was not long to remain the inexperienced schoolmistress of Motta-Visconti, though she was later to realize that in the four years she spent there "had been enclosed, as within a magic ring, the best part of her life, the most ingenuous, the richest in energy and freshness." It was, as a Florentine poet was to tell her in after years, her "heroic period." But fame found her quickly after *Fatalità* opened the road, and the "Milli Prize" from Florence, which assured her for the next ten years an annuity of a few

hundred dollars, was accompanied by the offer of a teacher's post in the Normal School at Milan. Here she could revisit the Brera galleries, and enjoy the many wonders of city life which had so excited her during a three-day visit arranged a year or two before by her good friend Signora Albisi. Now she could share that life to the full.

It was fairly certain that a part of her new experience would be that the harsh young virgin would fall in love, since she was now living for the first time among her equals, in a circle where intellectual and emotional cultivation might be taken for granted. And in fact the second volume of poems, *Tempeste*, bears witness to such an experience, brief but disturbing. There is suspense, absence, final desertion and disappointment; but her splendid strength reasserts itself, and the proud poem *Ego Sum* declares her enfranchisement from love's sorrows, and her repossession of herself. A poem some pages farther on, entitled *Amor novo*, suggests final recovery.

Aside from these few autobiographic hints, this second volume is chiefly concerned with such subjects as filled the first. Some of the most striking pictures of poverty and industrial miseries, such as "Eviction," "The Strike," "After the Strike," are in *Tempeste*, as well as the sympathetic poem, *I Grandi* ("The Truly Great"). These are, she says:

The Hungry, the Oppressed, who drag life's chain,  
Whom Nature dealt harsh lot,

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Who never knew reprieve or truce from pain  
    (And yet have hated not!),  
Who saw for others ripening the grain  
    (And yet have pillaged not!);

Who've but a bed of straw whereon to lie,  
    Ailing and slow to mend,  
Who've but a hospital cot whereon to die,  
    Yet love unto the end.

The allusion in the next to the last line receives added poignancy from our knowledge that it was on a hospital bed that Ada Negri's own father had died. A poem in this same volume, *L'Ospedale maggiore*, commemorates a visit she paid to the spot where he drew his last breath.

Saint Joseph's Alley, far down to the right,  
At Number Twenty. No one's in the bed  
Where years ago, this pillow at his head,  
    My father lay one night.

He died. And I—frail baby in my cot,  
For whom he shed his sacred dying tears,  
Whom he adored—his face, across the years,  
    Remember not.

In the same year with the publication of *Tempeste*, when Ada Negri was twenty-six, came the announcement of her marriage, and readers remembered *Amor novo*. The next volume was eight years in coming to light, and was entitled *Maternità*. Long before, in the days of her armoured maidenhood when she repelled the thought of love, the maternal instinct was already

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articulate in her, and she invoked maternity in a poem beginning "Never a child of my own!" With her ardour of nature, and her literary habit of self-revelment, we look for and find full expression of the experience which had absorbed those eight years of silence. The emotion of the mother who is waiting for her child to come into the world—"terrible little strange voice, which cries to the infinite tenderness of motherhood: 'Life, here am I!'"—the ecstasy of some moment when she hears her child cry out to her in a sunny April garden, the terror of the shadow that hangs over all parents, the fear that their child may die—all these intense moments of motherhood are caught, live and palpitating, and imprisoned in words. Very striking is her "Dialogue" with her unborn child:

'Tis he!—from being's depths unknown  
He stirs, in dreams I hear him cry:  
"In this pale, vast content am I;  
Why wilt thou claim me for thine own?"

Too sad thy world; I know its gloom;  
The unreturning dead have told.  
I ask not life. Oh, overbold  
Mother, to shape me in thy womb!"

"Nay, to one solemn call above  
No soul is silent, rebel none.  
Child, if love light for thee the sun,  
Live thou, burn thou, love back my love!" \*

Yet with all her passion, her intelligence is not sub-

\* Translated by Dora Greenwell McChesney, in "The Thrush," 1910.



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merged; it tells her that she could endure it better than her husband if the shadow should envelop them and they should lose their child, since she would have the consolation of her art, and the relief of expression.

I? Yes, I still could bear to live,  
Among her scattered, silent toys,  
Her lettered blocks, her blond-haired dolls  
That shut their china eyes—her joys!

White-haired and broken, still I'd live,  
And proudly fight to my last breath  
To master sorrow, and constrain,  
In verses that should challenge death.

But you, without the tiny bed  
That held your blossom, your white elf,  
You would not then have anything.  
I know that you would kill yourself.

The marriage of Ada Negri made a great difference to her literary career, not so much in the fertility or quality of her poetry as in the way it was received. The cry of social injustice being new in Italian poetry, her poems had seemed to identify her with a movement. Arturo Giovanitti had claimed her for internationalism in "The International," calling her "the sister-of-charity of the class war," and she had become something almost legendary, a kind of Joan of Arc of the poor. The legend received a rude shock when her marriage to a wealthy manufacturer of Biella, "the Manchester of Italy," lifted her into the very class that warfare is directed against. Reviewers of a hasty turn

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of mind, who were fond of catchwords, began to talk of Ada Negri's apostasy; and however unjust it may have been, some harm was assuredly done her literary reputation in so far as that rested on the legend of the wooden shoes.

That it was unjust, any fair-minded critic must believe. Her marriage did not at all destroy her sympathy for the humble and the oppressed; indeed, in the poem *Amor novo*, which we may fairly connect chronologically with her marriage, she warns her lover that he must espouse with her the cause of her poor. The poor and the suffering claimed her, she says, before he did; as long as she lives, their path is hers.

It is for that you love me? Oh, then come,  
Come with me, in the very name of grief. . . .

Come, come with me! Our chosen home shall be  
Wherever a defeated man needs aid,  
Wherever lonely childhood is afraid,  
Wherever seethe the ills of poverty.

This does not sound like betrayal. In any case, she had betrayed nothing, for she had promised nothing. She had merely made the instant response of a very ardent nature to such suffering as she had seen and understood. Later she was to see and understand other kinds. Her early life had thrown her among the impoverished slaves of industry, and she interpreted them with sympathy; marriage made her a mother, and her sympathy went out to mothers. Many of the poems of *Maternità* sing their sorrows; a pathetic young mother,

dead with her dead child in her arms; one demented with sorrow, who has followed hers into the grave; a desperate one, driven by hunger or shame to abandon hers in the street; a factory worker who can spare but three days in which to bring a dead child into the world—these are all brought before us in vivid little vignettes. It was not that Ada Negri's capacity for suffering in the sufferings of others had failed in prosperity, it was only that her sympathies had always been more personal and less sociological than they appeared.

She reversed the usual development, which is from the narrower to the wider, from the personal to the general. So far is this true that she was not to know until her thirties that kind of causeless melancholy which is oftener the indulgence of youth. Between her first three volumes of poetry and her next two, "Exile" and "Out of the Depths," there seems to have opened a gulf across her life. The fire, the struggle, the triumph of the earlier time, have given way to a dull depression, a kind of anæmia of the spirit, which seem the mark of a different personality. There are, to be sure, some objective reasons hinted at. A second baby girl has been born to her, only to die at the end of a month; she feels the first chill of middle age, "the melancholy of the first grey hairs"; her remaining daughter will soon be out of childhood, less dependent and less near; she has had a long sickness which threatened to prove mortal; society has claimed and tamed her, and left her half cynical and disillusioned.

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You do not know me? I may seem  
More fair to-day, more flexible  
In my smooth sheath of tawny velvet  
Which makes me something like a panther.  
I know now how to do my hair in waves,  
As well as ladies who go past in carriages;  
I now can feign a smile,  
Even while my heart breaks; I can break a promise,  
Give, with a cup of tea, my hand  
To those who turn their backs upon my door  
To tear my name to tatters, and my heart.

Her heart aches "as if they had trampled me under-foot," she has lost faith and thinks of suicide. Where now the valour of her strenuous girlhood, which defied misfortune to frighten her, and bade misery good day? There is nothing left of it but the restlessness and rebellion. Her courage had perhaps exhausted itself against the external obstacles of poverty and obscurity; against the inward foes of the spirit there was no fight left in her. Then, too, for her it was so evidently true that

That age is best which is the first;

for by the time she was thirty the factory woman's daughter had left her wooden shoes outside the door of a palace, and gone to live inside it, and had received the two guerdons she had most desired from life, motherhood and fame. The end of the serial came too soon. "Man's aim is to culminate," remarked Meredith; "but it is the saddest thing in the world to feel that we have accomplished it." Ada Negri had now

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to seek new occasions for living, or do without. She had not books to fall back upon, for hers is not a learned muse; and the writing impulse, while it did not fail her, as she had truly prophesied it would not, was not enough to keep alive her wish to live beyond the *quarantaine*. Perhaps, she says to the woman in the glass,

Perhaps, poor soul,  
To perish in thy spring were wise,  
Ere time, more fearful far than death,  
Make thee a stranger to thine eyes.  
Perhaps, poor soul,  
To close thyself the door were sweet—  
The door of dark and silence—while  
Thine eyes still glow with youth's last smile.

It is not possible to imagine the grave impassioned intellectualism of Alice Meynell or the high spirituality of Emily Dickinson permitting either to address herself thus; and Christina Rossetti, faced with this crisis in a woman's life, "answered: 'Yea!'" But a woman of Latin race would feel more sharply the failure of her *vie de femme*. Even a poetess does not know how to survive her *roman*. For, strangely enough, since it was never love that she asked of the gods, save once or twice in mere lip-service to rhetoric, it is precisely her *roman* that Ada Negri in her later verse bewails and invokes. It is as if outraged Aphrodite were avenging herself on the proud virgin of *Fatalità*, when Ada Negri owns to herself, in "Confession," and "To the One Who Never Came," that the spring of her life

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is broken because no one has ever moved her to the love of which she was capable.

I was none other's, yet was never thine,  
I am my own,

she writes—to whom? To the Unknown she writes:

I waited for you long after that day  
When first I knew that I had come to flower,  
A March primrose. One came, with true heart's dower.  
But " 'Tis not he!" my heart did softly say.

Sunshine and rain, thorns, roses, chaff and wheat  
The years brought to me. Love they brought me too.  
But brought not you! Yet one resembled you,  
Who knew to take my heart with magic sweet.

I lost myself, my pride aside I threw.  
. . . It was not you!

In a group of affectionate domestic poems in *Maternità* entitled *Dolcezza*, and dedicated "To Giovanni," there occurs this stanza:

To tell the tender love  
Which binds my heart to thy true heart alone—  
That love thou doubtest of!—  
See at thy feet what flowers on flowers I've thrown!

But it is evident that the instinct of her lover was sure. "Tender love," though sincere and wishful to be satisfying, was not all that her nature could have been moved to, and in "Confession" she admits it.



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Now when the night weighs heavy on the pain  
Of them that watch, and you are face to face  
With your sole self, alone and cold in space,  
Wrapped in your shift, as penitents have lain . . .

Confess that your rebellious disaccord  
Is nothing but a wail of sick distress  
From a weak soul who missed her happiness  
Because she failed to find her heart's true lord; . . .

And—though to say it be like a whip-stroke  
Upon your pride—that if to-morrow he  
Should come to you with arms outstretched, you'd be  
The very slave of love, and love your yoke!

Ada Negri's recent books show greater maturity and artistic mastery than the earlier ones do. *Il Libro di Mara*, her latest volume of poems, was published in 1914, while *Finestre alte* ("Upper Windows"), a second collection of short stories which followed her first, *Solitarie*, at rather a long interval, appeared in 1923. "Marah means waters of bitterness," and the burden of these later books is that the heart of woman knoweth its own. Tormented by the needs of the flesh, tragic prisoners within their own bodies of which they are always the victims, martyrs of love and maternity, women are pathetic and touching to her by reason of their helplessness and their incapacity for happiness. Like many other Italian women who are writing at present, she shows in these books the influence of the strange genius of Amalia Guglielminetti. In *Il Libro di Mara* she ventures to speak for all women out of her sym-

pathy and her bitterness, but not all will accept her as their interpreter.

If Ada Negri's poems succeed, in her own proud phrase, in "challenging death," it will be more for their human than for their literary value. Hers is a poetry without art and largely without form; it has little melodic beauty, and she comes cheaply off for her rhymes in a language where nearly all participles and infinitives can be made to chime. It is a poetry which is not poetic. But it is the direct, unforced expression of a deep sincerity, and that has carrying power in all departments of life. She has broken through the literary woman's frequent reticence, a reticence that hides itself under a flood of misleading words, and has been frank where she might have dressed her emotions prettily in plumes borrowed from man's view of her. It has not been, it would seem, a difficult frankness. Ada Negri gives to a singular degree the impression of having written in the only way it was possible to her to write, her verse having been forced from her by the power of her feeling and her need of self-expression.

But while she has thus given us some authentic documents of feminine psychology, a field in which most published knowledge has come at second hand, it is safe to prophesy that she will be remembered as the author of *I Vinti* and *I Grandi* rather than of *Confessione*. That is partly, of course, because of the legend, because of the personal appeal of the poor and proud young schoolmistress of Motta-Visconti. Her own eyes

and heart evidently turn back with regretful longing to her "heroic period," and we may leave her with a quotation from the most finished of her poems, "The Return to Motta-Visconti," whither she makes a sad pilgrimage, her baby girl tugging at her skirts, to look for her lost youth, and "that past of struggle and of hope, her rebellious, splendid past."

She saw again the twenty-year-old girl,  
 Her forehead marked with destiny's bright ray,  
 Trip down the steep roadway,  
 A proud young eaglet, winged and strong.  
 Her room, full of bright ghosts, she saw again,  
 The bed, where sleepless nights were full of song;  
 She seemed to see from her own veins the blood  
 Pour forth into her rhymes its flood,  
 Rhymes that went through the world upborne by pain,  
 That seemed a tocsin bell,  
 Of bare homes without bread or fire to tell,  
 And the dull grief of earth's defeated ones.

## PIRANDELLO'S PLAYS

THE ORIGINALITY and novelty of Luigi Pirandello's productions almost force us to a new definition of the drama. The protagonist of tragedy or serious comedy, we had always been taught to believe, was the human will at odds with something—fate, the emotions, another human will, the canons of society; its object was to move us to the emotions of pity and fear, or ironic laughter. But in Pirandello's plays the protagonist seems to be one of the "persistent problems of philosophy"—the problem of reality, the problem of knowledge, of identity, of the nature and test of truth—and the object is to convey an idea to the mind. Character, emotion and plot on his stage are not merely to interpret a human situation and throw light on human behaviour; they are at the same time acting out an abstract idea, the play is a kind of charade which we shall have to guess at the fall of the curtain. Pirandello has contrived to stage metaphysics.

It is usual to hear Pirandello's plays referred to as a "drama of ideas," but as we examine them it becomes evident that this name must be applied differently to different ones. It is used in two different senses, according to where, in whose brain, the idea is. Some of them, such as "Six Characters in Search of an Author," or "Thinking Makes It So" (*Così è—se vi pare*),

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are the dramatization of an abstract idea in the author's mind, which we must divine as best we can; in others, the idea is lodged in the mind of one of the characters, it affects his conduct, and becomes apparent to the spectator in action. Such plays as "A Confusion of Rôles" (*Il Giuoco delle parti*), "The Only Way" (*Se non così*), "Cap and Bells" (*Il Berretto a sonagli*), are a link between the sort of play we have been accustomed to for three-quarters of a century, and sheer *Pirandellismo*—between the "problem play," that is, and a play like "Thinking Makes It So," which is a dramatical critique of pure reason.

Now, in most problem plays, the leading rôle is assigned to an invisible, inaudible, very powerful personage, which is the social order, the convention of civilized society, and the problem often consists in a conflict between its requirements and the single suffering human soul. In the hands of Dumas, who invented the form and had a standing quarrel with society, its standards are shown to be inelastic, prejudiced, inhuman, his situations are designed to uncover its flaws; Augier, the good Augier, who thought he saw the *foyer* imperilled and sincerely believed they protected it, was concerned to prove that they are woman's best defence, and true and righteous altogether; Henry Arthur Jones and Pinero content themselves with demonstrating that at any rate, right or wrong, when it comes to a contest they are too strong for us. The motive power in the *pièce à thèse* is feeling, feeling of such intensity that not infrequently, when society has a character cornered

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up a blind alley, the issue is suicide or murder. The rôle of the intelligence is small, barely a speaking part. Indeed, in the person of a Cayley Drummle or an Olivier le Janin, it is not even intelligence that speaks, merely worldly wisdom. But in the plays of Luigi Pirandello the intelligence is allowed full sway. Too much has been conceded to the emotions hitherto, he seems to say; let us see what would happen if the philosopher were king.

### I

In this group of plays to which "A Confusion of Rôles" belongs, the emotions have played their part before the curtain rises, they have brought about the situation on which it is lifted, and it must be admitted that the inexhaustible invention of Pirandello has found several as crucial, violent and ticklish as those of any youngest Frenchman. But, their feelings having got his people into it, it is the intelligence which must get them out. Not their own, to be sure—that would usually be quite beyond those children of instinct who make drama; its rôle must be given to someone else, whose relation to the situation is essential but who has had no part in creating it, who shall incarnate the logic of a situation which the emotions of others have produced. He must be a kind of Nemesis, whose part is to see that the others are made accountable for the havoc they work, that its consequences fall in retribution squarely on their own shoulders.



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With their dialogue and characterization, these plays have a superficial effect of realism, but the *dénouement*, since it is thus brought about by logic, has nothing realistic about it, it is too perfect. It is not like life, on whose stage the wise have to pay the bills of the foolish, and the ripples of every disaster sink one or two innocent skiffs. Life's little ironies have no part in Pirandello's theatre, he brings circumstance to heel. It is all composed, it is the work of an artist.

When we speak of an "artist in living," doubtless we do not know quite what we mean, but we are probably taking the work of art to be his own life and personality; in these plays the "artist" has other lives, an entire dramatic situation, to work in as a medium; he groups and rearranges with an eye to the whole, to the pattern, the composition. Pirandello does not, indeed, make his whole play an "arrangement," as does the novelist of what Professor Beach calls the "novel of decoration"; he gets one of his characters to make it for him; and the resultant masterpiece is not merely a piece of lacquer like "Java Head," a square of brilliant embroidery like "The Bright Shawl," but really tells us something we did not know before about the true inwardness of a situation. To work it out to a logical conclusion is to reveal its inner meaning.

The man or woman to whom this task is confided has to be a little superhuman, has to see clearly, act rigorously and relentlessly, and deal not merely justice, but poetic justice. And either because of native gifts, or because he has already lived through much, he must in

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a sense have survived himself and his personal interests, he must be perfectly tempered and "beyond life." Part of his strength he gets from an indifference to the social sanctions; in Pirandello's plays the social order, along with the emotional hero and heroine, has lost its star part, and instead of being ranged against the emotions, which had such large but disputed rights in the problem play, it is often on their side. Yet their combined strengths do not avail against the intelligence; social pressure is a feeble ally when invoked against an enemy who is not afraid of it. The intelligence disregards it, and it is not.

We were at pains earlier to distinguish this group of plays in which we see the intelligence, the manipulator, the artist, at work, from those which, like the "Six Characters," dramatize an abstract idea; in reality these others do so too, only they all present the same one. They are dramas of ideas in two senses; each of them shows the working of logic applied to a given situation, yet all of them illustrate the same general idea—that the social sanctions are only social fears and a dread of what people may say, that to be indifferent to the opinion of others is the supreme enfranchisement. That more than any other thing can make "men like gods," and give them power over the lives of other people. Pirandello knows, however, that this is a doctrine only for the strong. In "Each in His Own Way" (*Ciascuno a suo modo*) we see how dependent an unstable character is on the opinion of others; when Delia encounters two opposite views of herself at the same moment, she

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loses her sense of her own personality, and only external circumstances by accident reveal her to herself.

In only one of these plays does this principle come near failing. In "Think of it, Giacomino!" (*Pensaci, Giacomino!*), the old schoolmaster who tries out of pure sympathy and disinterestedness to rearrange a situation for the better happiness of everybody except himself, finds the conventions of his provincial small town all but too much for him. To tell the truth, it is not only the conventions which he runs counter to; morality, as society understands it, and dignity are likewise unimportant to him, he is "of good character, but has no moral sense." All that matters to old Agostino Toti, professor of natural history, is kindness, and the simpler kinds of happiness for others. Dignity, which as a resolutely complaisant husband he throws to the winds, is for him—and so we suppose for his creator—but another appearance, and need not be "kept up" at the expense of the essentials. As Pirandello remarks in one of his essays: "What, after all, are the social aspects of the so-called conventions? Mere considerations of self-interest."

What are the essentials for Pirandello? In the matter of social morality, he seems to admit one and one alone—the social unit of father, mother and child. This will not always be identical with a family which society is willing to recognize, but whenever not, it takes precedence of it; if there be a reality in this world of vain appearances, it is the relation between these three. So when the old professor finds that Lillina, the

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seventeen-year-old whom he had intended to marry—*mariage blanc*, which would give him a companion and her a home and a pension—when he finds that Lillina and Giacomino are desperately in love, with no money to marry on and a child coming, he swallows his chagrin and marries her on the understanding that things shall go on as they are until his death shall enable them to marry. When the boy is born, he fathers it. His complaisance is rewarded by the hostility of the town—and of Lillina's parents in particular, who are furious at being brought into public disrepute, and will not enter his house—and by the threatened loss of his position and the prospect of the indispensable pension. Giacomino is worked upon by his sister and her priest and the scandalmongers until he deserts Lillina and offers marriage to another girl. The professor, outraged and incredulous at such perfidy, takes the baby on his shoulder and marches to the sister's house, flouts the priest who cries vainly, "Mortal sin!" and "Destroyer of the family!" and triumphantly persuades Giacomino to return—to what? Not his family exactly, not his home certainly; we can only say he returns to his unit. And here the play leaves them, all exactly where they were six months before, save that an implicit situation was perhaps easier to undermine than one now made explicit and undeniable. Pirandello evidently has great faith in the truth, though no author has been at greater pains to show that it is hard to recognize.

In "The Only Way," which its author has rechristened "The Rights of Others" (*La ragione degli altri*),

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the manipulator is a woman; and again dignity and morality, as they are interpreted by all the standards which society knows anything about, are sacrificed to the preservation of the social unit. Livia is a wronged wife, who has denied herself any form of resentment or recrimination, because there is a child involved. She herself has none, and stands aloof in sad abnegation from her husband's relation to the mother of his, until she learns that the latter is about to desert him and take the child with her. Then, since the primal group is certain to be broken up in any case by Elena's incorrigible lightness, Livia goes to her and persuades her to surrender the child to the happier future and assured name and position which she and her husband can give it. Though a light mistress, Elena is a serious mother, and has the "curtain" upon her tragic isolation among little Nini's scattered garments and toys.

The published editions of this play are prefaced by a letter to Livia from her creator, written after the play had been withdrawn from the boards because of failure to meet the exigencies of actors and actresses, and it is worth while translating it entire, since it is always difficult to find a dramatist expressing himself in his own person, and since Pirandello is an author who expects a great deal of his readers and audiences. As he himself makes the manager say in the "Six Characters": "What else can I do, if there are no more good comedies to be had from France, and we are reduced to putting on those of Pirandello, which nobody can make head or tail of and which he wrote on purpose just to



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make fun of you and me and the public?" It is well to take what help he offers.

A LETTER TO THE HEROINE, SIGNORA LIVIA ARCIANI

DEAR SIGNORA:

I hate to tell you so, but you do not play a very brilliant part in this comedy. And perhaps no actress of the first rank who respects herself will be found willing to play it.

You are not only a poor sterile wife; there are so many other things that you lack, besides the joy, the comfort, the prestige of children: grace, for example, and perhaps beauty. As for elegant manners, permit me to say it frankly, you are so poor in these that you had best live shyly and apart in the shadow and silence of your irremediable grief. Yet, at a certain moment, Signora, they force you to speak, to act, to make your ideas and your long sorrow count. And what follows? Alas, the most unpardonable of mistakes; I will spell it out to you syllable by syllable: you do not know how to carry off a scene.

Let us be fair. Can you seriously suppose that any actress of the first rank who respects herself will accept your rôle in the comedy?

Just once, in the third act, and then with such evident effort, taking your courage in both hands, you do try to carry off a great scene, a scene in which as often happens to one who has imposed silence upon himself and his sufferings for a long time, you do not at first succeed in finding the right tone of voice, and then at the end you allow the grief so long repressed to burst out almost in a frenzy.

Even this would not be so bad; but then, dear Signora, there befalls you the worst misfortune that can possibly be imagined (always with reference to that actress of the first rank who respects herself, and will have to take your rôle



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in the play); the misfortune, I mean, of being driven off the stage in the very middle of your scene by your husband, and in the presence of his mistress. Does that seem to you a small matter?

You go off with your head high, I know, and loftier and nobler even than before; and your spirit, if not your person, continues to dominate the scene and impress itself up to the very end of the act, more than if you were present; and you triumph, you alone, at the last. Yes, but the fact remains that only a little past the middle of that last act you go away, and do not appear again on the stage.

Can any actress of the first rank who respects herself tolerate such a thing, especially when there remains on the stage *the other woman*, your husband's mistress, who has a beautiful easy fat part, of pure effectiveness: the part of a mother whose child, dear Signora, you wish to take from her, a poor mother who actually does allow her little daughter to be taken from her at last by your husband, and who stays there alone on the stage with her little girl's toys; the toy farm before her on the table, with its little trees, its toy sheep, its shepherd and its sheepdog—and who suddenly becomes aware that she is holding the child's hood in her hands, and bursts into desperate sobbing as the curtain falls?

Ah, Signora, in comparison with a part like that, and right at the very end of the play, do not imagine that any actress of the first rank who respects herself could hesitate another moment: she throws your rôle away and chooses this one!

But you are the heroine? That does not matter, dear Signora. It may be quite true that everything that happens in all three acts happens only because of your particular way of thinking and feeling; that whatever there may be new or original in this play is what you say and how you say it—your feelings, as a sterile woman who understands that over and above her rights as a wife there is her husband's duty towards the daughter that another woman has given him, that

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you could not give him; and with that straight precise logic of yours, by which, as soon as you learned that his mistress, tired of him, was ready to send your husband back to you, you go and tell her that that is no longer possible, that the man she has stolen from you is no longer merely your husband, but is in her house a father also, that therefore the father must either stay where his daughter is, or she must give the child back along with himself.

All very true, yes, this may be all very true; but it is likewise true, dear Signora, as I said to you in the beginning, that you do not play a very brilliant part in this comedy. Stay where you are, then, in your book. Upon our stage, such as it is, and you being what you are, you cannot make any headway to-day, I promise you. You lack, Signora, what in theatrical slang is called a "vehicle."

Your most affectionate author,

LUIGI PIRANDELLO.

In "Cap and Bells," "A Confusion of Rôles," and "The Luxury of Being Virtuous" (*Il piacere dell'onestà*), the "artist" works out the situation with remorseless logic. In "A Confusion of Rôles," a wife contrives by a trick that her mild philosophic crank of a husband, who has long been the butt of herself and her lover, shall have to fight a duel in her defence. As he knows nothing of weapons, she is confident of soon being rid of him; but he manipulates the situation so that at the last moment it is the lover who has to fight, and who gets himself killed. Logic again, and poetic justice. The lover has usurped the husband's privileges; let him accept the husband's rights and responsibilities. In

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this play, reality is made to assume responsibility for the appearances; in "Caps and Bells," "The Luxury of Being Virtuous," and "Not a Serious Matter," appearances are required to take on reality. In the first-named of these, a wife of wildly jealous disposition invokes the law, and consequently the fierce light of publicity, upon the relations between her husband and the wife of his clerk. These are apparently innocent; the clerk believes them to be such; but rather than accept the rôle of a husband who contents himself with the negative findings of the court, of whom it may be said later that he has allowed his wealthy superior to settle with him, he announces that he will now have to kill both his employer and his wife. He is resentful of the necessity, bitter against the jealous Beatrice for forcing him to it, but there is no other way! Beatrice, her mother and the neighbours argue with him, and promise to prevent him, but he warns them that they will never succeed; then they try to dissuade him, reminding him that the trouble was after all occasioned by a mere jealous "madness." This word arrests his attention, he pauses on it, and finally declares that if Beatrice will accept the consequences of her own act, will allow the fact of her madness to be established and withdraw to an asylum, then he will give over his project of formal vengeance. And this logical conclusion Beatrice and her supporters, aghast, are obliged to accept; poetic justice prevails.

In "The Luxury of Being Virtuous," a husband has to be found for Agata, to cover her fault committed with a

married man. Angelo, a gentlemanly intellectual with a dubious past, consents to this marriage, and is rather pleased to find that now, with a position and a fortune and a fresh start, he can allow himself the luxury of being good. But he logically perceives that only an excessive and extravagant probity hereafter can atone for the humiliating rôle he has accepted. He becomes positively fantastic in righteousness, and self-righteousness, and makes the situation perfectly odious to everybody. The disappointed lovers find themselves forced to give each other up; his assumption of rights over his wife's child he pushes to provoking lengths. But then his forced reading of the situation gradually makes the facts conform to it; he is a successful pragmatist in living; his motto is not quite, "it is true because it works", rather, "make it work and it will come out to be true;" and we leave him as the happy husband of a submissive and completely dazzled Agata.

## II

Of the plays which dramatize abstract ideas, "The Grafting" (*L'innesto*), with its violent and horrible story and its triumphantly beautiful solution, is a study in appearance and reality in which reality is proudly shown to be essentially of the spirit; the external, the physical, the actual, even with the odds laid cruelly in their favour, are shown to be merely appearances. Laura Banti believes and loves until she makes this high and difficult doctrine true not only for herself, but also, and in circumstances of an inconceivable difficulty, for

her husband. "Henry IV" is another; it contrasts the reality of the sane with the reality of the insane, showing how the one impinges upon the other and tests the other, and how they sometimes seem to merge and blend. In that play of Pirandello's which is best known outside of Italy and has had such sensational success on the stage in Paris and New York, "Six Characters in Search of an Author," he is doing several things at once—dramatizing the artistic process of creation, giving hints of dramatic criticism, making vivid the dramatist's standing grievance against the actor, condemning the stage and public of our day, and, above all, saying that art is the great reality, that art is more real than life. A different kind of reality, however; for when art puts on entire actuality, in "Each in His Own Way," it perishes.

We have heard from many a novelist and dramatist that characters in a book or play are likely at any time to take the bit in their teeth and remould their story and their respective rôles quite independently of their creator's plans for them. Sometimes we believe this, sometimes we think the idea a mere artistic affectation, but the "Six Characters" should convince us of its truth, since they speak for themselves. We see them carrying on their independent lives outside the covers of the portfolio where their author had left them, and asserting vigorously their entities and separate existences; as one of them says: "When a character is once born, he immediately acquires such independence even of his author, that one can imagine him in many situations in



which the author never thought of putting him." In such a situation we see the "Six" live and move.

The plot is familiar to most readers by now. A company of players are about to rehearse one of Pirandello's own plays, "A Confusion of Rôles," when a group of strangers appear who say they are the characters in a play which their author grew tired of and cast aside, that they are longing to play their rôles, and have vainly tried everything to tempt him to go on and give them their lives upon the boards. The practical manager does not burden himself with believing this rigmarole, but seizes the chance of getting hold of a piece he may like better than the one he has on hand, "by an author whom I particularly detest." The "Six" play out their dreadful story for him piecemeal—throwing in recriminatory remarks at each other the while, and explanations to the manager, which of course are not in their original parts—and the manager begins to think he can make something of it. He hastily scribbles a scenario, distributing the parts which the prompter has taken down in shorthand as the characters spoke them, and the company begins to rehearse. Then the gap which yawns between even a good actor's conception of a rôle, and its reality—that is, the author's conception of it—is brilliantly made visible. Each character is outraged or amused as he sees a stranger trying to be himself. The brazen stepdaughter laughs aloud as the leading lady "registers" shame, in a scene which as a "character" she has lived through in a mood of cynical disgust. And the father protests to the manager,



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with a humility which adds to his effect: "Believe me, sir, it is almost inhuman suffering for us, with this body, this face . . . the voice, the gesture . . . To see myself represented by I don't know whom . . . The representation he will make of me, even trying his best to look like me . . . will hardly represent me as I really am. Apart from the face, it will all be rather as he interprets me to be, as he feels me—if he feels me at all—and not as I feel myself to be, within. And it seems to me that those who come to criticize us ought to take account of this. . . . I admire your actors, sir, I admire them. That gentleman, there, and that young lady—but certainly I must say they are not *us*." The irritated manager maintains there is no reason why they should be. "You as yourself, my dear sir, have no existence. It is the actors who represent you. . . . Your expressions become their material, to which they give face and body, voice and gesture; they have often given representation to much better subjects; yours is so small a matter that if it has any effect at all on the stage, the merit, believe me, will be entirely that of my actors." This silences the father but does not convince him, and later in the play he has a chance to express his inner conviction, which is that a "character" is after all more real than any person, that art is more real than life. He has just annoyed the manager by asking him a Socratic question: "Can you tell me who you are?"

*The Manager* [astonished and irritated, turning to his actors]. If this fellow here hasn't got a nerve! A man who calls himself a character comes and asks me who I am!

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*The Father* [with dignity, but not offended]. A character, sir, may always ask a man who he is. Because a character has really a life of his own, marked with his especial characteristics; for which reason he is always "somebody." But a man—I'm not speaking of you now—may very well be "nobody."

*The Manager*. Yes, but you are asking these questions of me, the boss, the manager! Do you understand?

*The Father*. But only in order to know if you, as you really are now, see yourself as you once were with all the illusions that were yours then, with all the things both inside and outside of you as they seemed to you—as they were then indeed for you. Well, sir, if you think of all those illusions that mean nothing to you now, of all those things which don't even seem to you to exist any more, while once they were real for you, don't you feel that—I won't say these boards—but the very earth under your feet is sinking away from you when you reflect that in the same way this you as you feel it to-day—all this present reality of yours—is fated to seem a mere illusion to you to-morrow?

*The Manager* [without having understood much, but astonished by the specious argument]. Well, well! And where does all this take us anyway?

*The Father*. Oh, nowhere! It's only to show you that if we [indicating the Characters] have no other reality beyond the illusion, you too must not count overmuch on your reality as you feel it to-day, since, like that of yesterday, it may prove an illusion for you to-morrow.

*The Manager* [determining to make fun of him]. Ah, excellent! Then you'll be saying next that you, with this comedy of yours that you brought here to act, are truer and more real than I am.

*The Father* [with the greatest seriousness]. But of course; without doubt!

*The Manager*. Ah, really?

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*The Father.* Why, I thought you'd understand that from the beginning.

*The Manager.* More real than I?

*The Father.* If your reality can change from one day to another . . .

*The Manager.* But everyone knows it can change. It is always changing, the same as anyone else's.

*The Father* [with a cry]. No, sir, not ours! Look here! That is the very difference! Our reality doesn't change: it can't change! It can't be other than what it is, because it is already fixed for ever. It's terrible. Ours is an immutable reality which should make you shudder when you approach us if you are really conscious of the fact that your reality is a mere transitory and fleeting illusion, taking this form to-day and that to-morrow, according to the conditions, according to your will, your sentiments, which in turn are controlled by an intellect that shows them to you to-day in one manner and to-morrow . . . who knows how? . . .\*

"Thinking Makes It So," whose title Mr. Livingston has translated more exactly, "Right You Are! (If you Think So)," dramatizes the sceptical position of the Sophists; it demonstrates that there is no objective test of truth, that truth is merely subjective and consequently different for everybody. Of course, Pirandello ironically admits, as Mr. Livingston says, that "there are people who *know*. . . . The State knows, with its laws and its procedures. And society knows, with its conventions. And individuals know, with their formulas of conduct often cannily applied with reference to interest." But these are all self-deceived. The wise man knows

\* Translated by Edward Storer, in "Three Plays by Luigi Pirandello," Dutton, 1922.

that this knowledge is only seeming and, like Laudisi in this play, knows for certain only that he knows nothing.

A new clerk comes to the prefect's office in a small provincial town, which is speedily scandalized to learn that he keeps his wife under lock and key, and does not permit even her mother to visit her. He has taken a lodging for his mother-in-law at the other end of the town, and allows her merely to look up at her daughter's window from the court below, and to send her gifts and messages in a little basket that runs up and down on a string. Pirandello's humour, which is never far below the surface, has its fun in this play with the town gossips, who, moved actually by a burning curiosity to get to the bottom of this singular situation, assemble in solemn conclave to condemn the new clerk's inhumanity. The mother-in-law is duly called on in the hope of getting light on the matter, and when she does not even receive her visitors, much less return the courtesy, the clerk is summoned to explain her want of manners. He is covered with regret and chagrin at having to make public his sad situation, but explains that he has forbidden his mother-in-law to pay or receive visits, and keeps his wife locked away from her, because the poor lady is mad. She believes his present wife, who he explains is his second, to be his first, who was her daughter, and his only means of making her happy and fostering her delusion is to keep them apart. Thus she may believe him a villain, but at least is spared the cruel knowledge that her daughter is dead. He plays the ogre out of compassion. The company are moved

by this story to Aristotelian emotions, and the clerk is exonerated. But then comes the mother-in-law to return the visit after all, and explains in her turn that the clerk is mad. Shortly after her marriage the daughter had to be sent for a time to a sanitarium, and her husband, in his despair at being forbidden to see her, conceived that she had been allowed to die there. When she returned to him after some months, restored to the bloom of health, he refused to recognize her and, accepting her only as a second wife and after a second marriage ceremony, is now so afraid that she also may be taken from him that he keeps her locked in her apartment. Both women accept this unnatural situation to quiet his distress, hoping to heal his madness in the end. The gossips are now in despair. Those who have heard the husband's story accept it unhesitatingly; those who have listened to the old lady accept hers. Those who have heard both are like to die of perplexity and baffled curiosity. Finally they bethink themselves that there is one presumably sane person who really knows—the wife. She is sent for in secret, but as both husband and mother unfortunately put in an appearance at the same time, she dare not remove her heavy veil, and contents herself with saying: "I am the daughter of Signora Frola, and the second wife of Signor Ponza. Yes, and—for myself, I am nobody. . . . For myself I am—whoever you choose to have me." Nobody but Laudisi can be satisfied with this reply; he is delighted, and has the last word of the play: "Well, and there, my friends, you have the truth! Are you pleased?"

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The central principle of pragmatism is dramatized again in *La vita che ti diedi* ("The Life I Gave You"). A mother whose son has been absent seven years sees him return at last—altered and shattered—to die. She will not let his death make any difference to her. Her son was alive during all those years of his absence, she says, yet totally changed from her remembrance of him, could she but have known it; now he is absent again, and if for a different and more final reason, yet what real practical difference is there after all? During those seven years the memory of him that she cherished was not the reality he presented to others, the son she was remembering and loving did not during those years exist for anyone else. And so it is now. The situation as she feels it is essentially unchanged. What is true for her continues for a time to "work" as truth, and she has all the comfort that lies in the difference between absence and death. But finally the truth as the world sees it breaks in upon her, and she sees that the converse of her proposition has equal force; that if it be true to say, as she has been saying, that her idea of her son has as much reality now after his death as it had during his absence, it is equally true that it had no objective reality during either period. That personality really died when she saw the last of him seven years ago.

These plays, evidently, are not at all like anything we are used to. They tell us nothing about human emotion or circumstance, or the interplay of character.



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They are purely metaphysical. It may not be too fanciful to call them mystery plays, plays which dramatize the mysteries not of ritual and the liturgy but of the processes of thought.

### III

The prefect's question seems to imply that Signora Ponza must after all have an individuality, an entity of her own, apart from what she is for others—"But for yourself, Signora, who are you?" In several other plays, however, which may be grouped together for convenience, Pirandello makes the answer Signora Ponza herself makes: "For myself, I am whoever you choose to have me." He is evidently haunted by this problem of personal identity, of the integrity of our personality and its possible disintegration, of the multiple self in each one of us which can present a different face to each of several persons, which nearly always is one thing to ourselves and another to the world. In "The First and Second Mrs. Morli," a variation upon the theme of "Enoch Arden," the return of the first husband reawakens in the wife a wild young madcap self that she had quite forgotten during the years she had been the sober matronly self her second husband had called out; she had been unconscious that there were two, as long as they were consecutive, but on finding them both alive in her at once, she suffers the tortures of dissociated personality. The play dramatizes the saying of Pascal, quoted elsewhere by Pirandello: "There is

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no man who differs more from any other than he does from himself through the passage and succession of time." In "All for the Best" (*Tutto per bene*), a man is stripped of his own personality—emptied, as he puts it—on learning that the dead wife he has passionately mourned for many years had been unfaithful to him in life, and that the fact had been known to his circle all the time. In "As Before, Better Than Before" (*Come prima, meglio di prima*), known to the American stage as "Floriani's Wife," a wife is forgiven by her husband after fifteen years of errancy, and received back into her home on the footing of second wife, and step-mother to the daughter she had forsaken in infancy; here the division between her real self and the one she impersonates, almost unhinges her. In "Man, Beast and Virtue," a brutally candid professor, own brother to Henry Higgins and John Tanner, is caught in a situation which forces him to deceive and play a part on a colossal scale. In the novel, "The Late Mattia Pascal," the hero survives, without contradicting it, the announcement of his own death, and learns how dependent our personality is on the way it is reflected in the world about us, how little there is left of us when we no longer exist for the neighbours, the community, the census-taker.

### IV

All these plays, and all these classes of plays, Pirandello calls comedies, though the "Six Characters" is

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full of horror, though the heroine of "Thinking Makes It So" is a victim of the insanity of either her mother or her husband, though "Clothe the Naked" (*Vestire gli ignudi*) ends as it begins, with a suicide. The two incompatible words old Thomas Rymer wedded to make fun of "Othello" truly describe them all: each is a "tragic farce." His book on the philosophy of humour—for Pirandello, besides being a poet and playwright, a novelist and short-story writer, is a critic and professor, with student years in Germany behind him—explains why they are all comedies to him. Humour, as he defines it in *L'Umorismo*, is a feeling for contrasts, for opposites, which is the fruit of a certain gift of reflection in humorists. Merely to note a contrast—as between an old woman and her rouge, her wig, and her youthful costume—that, says Pirandello, is to go no further than the comic; but when reflection suggests that the old woman's motive may be to keep the affections of a young husband, then the touch of pity, the very opposite of laughter, makes it humour. If the comic writer reflects, he only laughs; the satirist grows angry; the humorist will feel compassion. The delusions of Don Quixote are merely comic to Sancho Panza; their creator, who saw their nobility and pathos as well as their absurdity, was a humorist. Giordano Bruno's motto, says Pirandello, is the very motto of humour itself: *In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis*.

With Pirandello's definition in mind, we must classify "Man, Beast and Virtue," and "Liolà," a scabrous ver-

sion of the truth that you cannot have it both ways, as merely comic; all the other plays have passed through the special process of the humorist's reflection: they are humorous, because they present both poles of the contrast he sees. So the "Six Characters," while their own story is pure tragedy of horror, are merely ridiculous in the eyes of the manager and his company; yet the play itself, showing them from both points of view at once, is in Pirandello's sense of the word a work of humour.

The entire series of his collected comedies Pirandello calls "Naked Masks" (as he calls a selection from his nearly four hundred short stories "Naked Life"), by which he seems to mean, rather, unmasked, no mask at all; for, as he says in *L'Umorismo*, the function of the humorist is to tear off the masks that conceal us from each other, that conceal us from ourselves, that cover our past selves under the self of the present—forms, one and all of them, of adaptation, of protective colouring, instruments of the struggle for existence. "The humorist amuses himself by unmasking them all. He does not grow angry about it. It simply is so. . . . An epic or dramatic poet may represent a hero in whom opposed and contradictory elements are shown at strife with each other, but he has out of these elements to *compose* his character, to make it coherent in all its actions. The humorist does just the opposite. He decomposes, disintegrates and analyses the character into its elements. While the one is careful to make it coherent, the other finds his amusement in representing it in all

its incongruities and inconsistencies. . . . If the humorist does not see the world quite naked, he sees it at least, so to speak, in its shift."

What at last are the realities for Pirandello, tormented as he is by the sense that most actuality is unreal, is only a mask for some quite different reality? One, evidently, is art, which is more real and more enduring than life; in human life it is the child, and his essential relation to his parents; and there is one other—the past. Part of the reality of the "Six," apparently, is that their story is finished, their saga ended and therefore immutable, it is already known what its *dénouement* was; the two children who are to die at its close are dead already and mute throughout the play, the "characters" suffer from what will be, knowing it beforehand, as much as from what has been. In "Henry IV," likewise, there is a kind of restfulness, the hero says, in living out as he does in his madness a story already eight hundred years old; it is true, it is settled for ever and unchangeable, you know for a certainty how it will "come out."

But Pirandello's last word will always be a word of scepticism. As the old novelist in "Clothe the Naked" says: "Facts! Facts! My dear sir, facts are as they are assumed to be. Besides, for the spirit, there are no facts. Only life, as it appears this way or that way. Facts are the past, when courage has given way and life forsakes them. That is why I do not believe in facts."

## RENATO FUCINI

IF YOU happen to be travelling from Siena to Pisa, you will probably have to change trains at Empoli. It is a dull little town, with but one claim to fame. In the year 1260, after that bitter Florentine defeat which crimsoned the waters of the Arbia, Empoli was the scene of the Ghibelline war council, where Farinata degli Uberti—so he told Dante, standing proudly erect upon his blazing heretic's bed, in hell—"when it was proposed to raze Florence to the ground, alone defended her with open face." Now, Empoli is merely an item upon the Tuscan *orario*, and from the battle of Montaperti until this day has enjoyed but one other literary association. It was the retreat during his last years, until his death in 1922, of the sunshiny, salty, witty spirit which half-concealed itself under the anagram of "Neri Tanfucio"; it was there that he scribbled down on the backs of old envelopes, on unanswered invitations, on any scraps that came to hand, the random recollections which he called *Acqua passata*, "Water That Has Run Under the Mill."

Renato Fucini was born in a village of Leonardo's commune of Vinci, and grew up in the Tuscan Maremma which tinged and nourished the earliest impressions of Carducci. His father was a *medico condotto*, one of



those devoted country doctors like the narrator in Farina's tale of the "Bass-Viol Player," or the one in Ugo Ojetti's amusing *Mio figlio ferroviere*, who are provided by the state for the rural districts, who see a deal of human nature, and spend themselves generously for it. The elder Fucini was a born satiric poet, according to his son, who has preserved in print a good many of his rhyming epigrams. "When I first began to write verses that found favour," says Renato, "people would say: 'Sor David must have had a finger in this!' and my father would be delighted. Later, the same people would say of my father's verses, when they were pleased with them: 'Sor Renato must have had a finger in this,' and my father (alas for human nature!) didn't like it."

By profession, "Neri Tanfucio" was an engineer, and for many years was school-inspector, and for a time teacher, in the region lying round about Pistoia, so that by reason of both callings he came to know the village people and *contadini* of Tuscany as well as if he had been a *medico condotto* himself. He saw many changes. Many a Tuscan village, like Ferdinando Martini's "Periposa," a backwater of quiet gossip and neighbourly life unchanged for centuries, he saw turn into the local head-quarters of a general strike. In his time the *contadina*, who used to improvise in her love-season the *rispetti* and *strambotti* which A. Mary F. Robinson imitated in the 'eighties, had learned to sing at dusk in the fields—Renato Fucini heard her singing as she plied her sickle, waist-deep in poppies:

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*E quando morirò, non voglio Cristi,  
Non voglio avemmarie nè paternostri:  
Voglio la compagnia de' socialisti.*

Fucini's student days were spent at the University of Pisa, and there at the theatres and cafés, or lounging along the Lungarno, he absorbed the amusing Pisan dialect in which he was to write his Hundred Sonnets.

There throng the people; how they come and go,  
Lisp the soft language, flaunt the bright garb—see!  
On Piazza, Calle, under Portico.

The "Hundred Sonnets in Pisan Dialect" were all written at Florence in 1870 and 1871, when Fucini as city engineer was trying to support a wife and two children on four *lire* a day, and cut a figure in Florentine society. The "Fifty New Sonnets in Pisan Dialect" followed ten years later. Nearly all of them dialogues, many of them satirical, with a sting or a surprise in the last line, not dramatic, telling no story like the sonnets in Neapolitan of Salvatore di Giacomo, hardly ever concerned with love, they are little snap-shots of a hundred and fifty aspects of contemporary life in Pisa. The telegraph, the use of gas, the bicycle, the removal of the capital from Florence to Rome, divorce, the end of the temporal power, these things made the news of the city and had to be discussed in "Neri's" sonnets, along with the latest gossip about betrothals, runaway wives, new books and new babies.

Fucini's best friend in those days of their twenties was Edmondo de Amicis, who wrote years later

of the reception given to the "Hundred Sonnets":

"The appearance of these sonnets in Florence was like the explosion of a handful of skyrockets. They had currency in manuscript . . . and if one happened to read a few of them aloud at an evening party, one was constantly interrupted by bursts of laughter which drew the curious from all corners of the room. . . . The whole populace was portrayed in them, with all its ingenuousness, its suspicions, its superstitions, its shrewdness, its folly. . . . Here are kindly women of the people, day-labourers, militiamen, jurors, students, magistrates, children, fishermen, priests, pickpockets, gamins, all talking of their affairs, complaining of the taxes, speaking ill of their government, buying numbers in the lottery, going hungry; they make fun of each other, insult each other, beat, succour and console each other. . . . He wrote his sonnets in his off hours, hurriedly, because he had no time to waste. If they did not turn out well in twenty minutes, he let them go. He would take up his pen when he put down his compass, measure his verses when he grew tired of measuring angles."

The trick of it looked easy. De Amicis tried again and again to catch it. In the evenings, when the two friends would stroll arm-in-arm down the Lungarno, he would get Fucini to recite his latest sonnet, interrupting him in the middle to say: "Stop, I can guess the next line." But he never could. The unforced conversational tone was *inarrivabile*.

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At first, Fucini's colleagues found it ridiculous that an engineer should write poetry.

*Neri*

And do they really say——

*Pippo*

Didn't you hear?

Oh, high society people right enough,  
They said: "If he writes all that poetry stuff,  
He's probably a rotten engineer."

But suddenly the rôles were reversed, and the Florentines laughed to think a poet could be a tolerable surveyor.

But Renato Fucini hardly seemed to think of himself as a poet. Certainly he never put on any airs as a literary man. Guido Biagi recalls the old loft he reclaimed from a granary to be his modest study (his "studianary," he called it, his *studianaio*), with its cheerful collection of old pipes, drawings, a few books, his gun and game-bag, nothing in it to suggest the stint of so many pages expected daily by a hounding editor; and contrasts it with the severe work-room of De Amicis, the unpainted shelves and desk, the paraphernalia of note-books and engagement-books, where he wrote his infallible five or six pages per day, like a militiaman going through his drill.

Publicity Fucini really disliked. The invitations these first successes of the sonnets brought him, and the pressure on him from friends to publish them, caused him nothing but dismay. The sonnets were born quite

## RENATO FUCINI

by chance; he had scribbled verses, to be sure, ever since he was a child, but the first sonnet in Pisan dialect was prompted by a friend's account of a recent flood in Pisa, and of the many tragi-comic episodes and piquant dialogues that took place between the hungry prisoners stranded in their houses and the rescuers in boats under their windows. The story was told in the old Caffè dei Ristori, now defunct, before a group of habitués including Fucini, who appeared the following evening with the most amusing of these dialogues cast into a sonnet. "The next evening I had another, which received the same welcome; the third evening, another; the fourth, another, and so on for many an evening more . . . many sonnets which I have forgotten now, and which never saw the light."

To try to give any samples of them in English is to do Fucini a cruel injustice, since their chief defect is a jerky, fragmentary quality of style, which becomes still more conspicuous in a language less naturally flowing than the Italian. And half their fun is gone. This last, however, must be laid not to any defect of the English language, but to the fact that these translations were not made by the author, for example, of the "Sonnets to a Red-haired Lady." At any rate, here are two of them, offered with propitiations to the poet's shade.

### THE FREE CLINIC

#### *Patient*

Doctor, could I see you?

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*Doctor*

Why, yes, come in.

*Patient*

Do I disturb you?

*Doctor*

No, just tell me where——

*Patient*

What a nice office!

*Doctor*

Yes, it gets good air.

Now, what's your trouble? Pain? How have you been?

*Patient*

I'll tell you, doctor, I don't fuss or whine  
About myself. Why, even when I saw,  
That time—you just ask Rose's mother-in-law.

*Doctor*

But——

*Patient*

You know her? A relative of mine.  
You know, she married that Caprona man.

*Doctor*

Your symptoms, please?



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*Patient*

Just wait, I'll come to that.  
That tiresome woman drinks so it's a shame.  
And her own husband (Henry was his name)  
Called *me* a gossipy old tabby-cat.  
You can imagine what *I* said!

*Doctor*

*I can!*

LAST NIGHT'S SHOW

*Verdiana*

Did we enjoy ourselves? Well, I should say!  
A splendid show. And there, in the last act,  
Where *he* finds *her*—it's thrilling, for a fact.

*Beppe*

Go on, tell me the story of the play.

*Verdiana*

Well, it's about like this. *He* goes to sea  
(Or rather he pretends to), and comes back  
To find *the other man* upon his track.  
(*She'd* given him her picture first.) Then *he*,  
What does *he* do? Rushes without his hat  
Off to his uncle's where he makes a scene—  
"It's death for him or me, now!" just like that.  
When *she* hears all this—looking like a queen,

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Her dress like mine, exactly—from the shelf  
She takes a bottle down and kills herself.

His beginnings as a prose-writer were just as inconsequential as the first sonnet. A group of guests who had been dining with Fucini's friends, the Signori Ubalдино and Emilia Peruzzi (perhaps of the Florentine family of "them of Pera"), were prevented by a snow-storm from driving back into Florence that night, and Signora Emilia (like her namesake at Urbino long ago) set them all to work with their wits, commanding Renato to write a preface for the "Pisan Sonnets," then in press. Very much against his will, for he was dropping with sleep, he tried it, but his effort was hooted down with derision as the clock struck half-past one. They made him try it again, with the same result; a third attempt met the same fate; and the party broke up agreeing what a great pity it was that one so fluent in verse should have to make such a struggle to write prose, and then write it badly. "I went to bed with a thorn in my heart and in my self-esteem. I began writing anything, everything, tales, comedies, novels, tragedies, and tore them all up after the first few pages, beginning again with a frantic determination quite out of my character. The sting had gone so deep that I never stopped till I had accomplished *Il Matto delle giuncaie*." This was published in the *Nuova Antologia*, where it attracted a good deal of attention and launched Fucini as a short-story writer. For this vocation he had three beautiful gifts, humour, and pity, and the art to

make both express themselves through his episodes and personages without emphasis or comment of his. He could be impersonal without being unsympathetic. There are three volumes of the short stories, *Le Veglie di Neri*, *All' aria aperta*, and *Nella campagna toscana*, besides *Napoli a occhio nudo* (travel sketches in the form of letters to a friend) and a series of elementary readers which are original and Tuscan enough almost to be called literature. He attained facility enough at last, for *Scampagnata*, one of his most popular successes, he says he wrote between ten in the morning and eight at night. House-bound that time also by bad weather, he got his daughter to play the piano for him to stimulate composition, interrupting her at intervals to read what he had written, and to receive the fond domestic applause: "*Bravo Renato! Bravo babbo! Avanti, avanti!*"

*Gente allegra, Iddio l'aiuta* ("Heaven helps the light-hearted") was the motto of the kind hosts at Casa Peruzzi, and if that miraculous fluency of Fucini's seemed to testify to some sort of celestial propulsion, he certainly had the merry temper the proverb calls for. He tells a delightful story of a polite young English tutor in a house he frequented in his youth, with whom he felt a kind of natural congeniality, but since neither one could speak a word of the other's language, they had to content themselves with expressive glances, smiles and handshakes. One evening as Fucini was taking his leave, the English boy accompanied him in his affectionate enthusiasm all the way down the stairs to the outer

door, and the merry-hearted poet, wishing to make some return for such courtesy, with an extra-warm clasp of the hand and a beaming smile, ejaculated by way of good night: "Sleeping-car!" "Yes, yes!" delightedly cried the English youth, as he ran up the stairs, "laughing in all the languages of Europe." Another story he tells of a practical joke he played upon the ancient nuns of Sambuco, near Pistoia, whose civilizing little school up among the hills it was his duty to inspect from time to time—good souls whom he dearly loved, and who loved him in spite of his being, as he says, a brand for the burning. Among the pious lithographs on the walls of the *parlatoio* was one which reminded him ever so little of Garibaldi, so when the Mother Superior entered he expressed some surprise that she should keep a portrait hung up there among her saints, of that enemy of the temporal power, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Trembling and turning pale, the poor old innocent made Fucini point it out to her, then hurried across the room, pulled it down, and hung it up again with the General's face to the wall. Fucini learned afterward with some remorse that no sooner had he left the convent than the chaplain was sent for in haste, and found "all those octogenarian infants" in a state of piteous agitation which he tried in vain to calm. Nothing would do but they should all be confessed, receive the blessed sacrament, ring all their convent bells to the great alarm of the villagers, display the saint of their special veneration, make a *triduum*, have their *parlatoio* reconsecrated, and spend the night on their knees in the chapel, fasting.

The poor old chaplain, recounting the history to Fucini in humorous reproof, was still trembling from fatigue and want of sleep. But General Garibaldi had been well exorcized, and his face never more profaned the *parlatoio* wall at Sambuco.

Fucini must have been a conscientious, shrewd and human school-inspector and an ideal schoolmaster, especially since his subject was the Italian language, but administration was detestable to him, and he refused the position of *Provveditore degli studi*, with the full approval, as he humorously adds, of his friend Sidney Sonnino. Professionalism could never mark him, but it did once get him out to a Congress of School-teachers. He kept very still throughout the sessions, and even when asked to contribute something in his own vein to the gaieties of the final banquet, he declined. But during the night he got to thinking over the meetings, and all the pedantic speeches and parliamentary absurdities he had listened to inspired him to get out of bed and write a burlesque of the convention. At the close of the banquet he rose, to the surprise of all the company, and after promising to tear up his production as soon as he should have finished, proceeded to read it.

"It was a most amusing scene. At the beginning, perfect silence and attention. But when, after calling the roll and reading the minutes, I began to make the various speakers take the floor, the scene was changed—Homeric laughter at the expense of the victims of my satire, long faces or spasmodic smiles from the victims themselves, who, as the rôles shifted, laughed their heads

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off at each new victim, who laughed in his turn at the next. . . . If one, flicked on the quick, raised his voice in rebellion, a volley of cries at once roared him down. . . . When I finally came to the chairman, Professor Siciliani of the University of Bologna, a famous educationalist whom the Ministry had sent us for our guidance and enlightenment, my success came little short of a disaster. As I parodied his closing speech, in which he had said, among other things, that Jesus Christ was of his opinion, there burst a perfect hurricane of hilarity. Even the professor, who had laughed so loudly at all the others, after some slight show of resentment, went into such convulsions of laughter that with the veins standing out upon his neck, his face purple, his eyes starting out of his head, and his chest heaving in a really alarming manner, he fell backward on his seat, choking and spluttering, and gesticulating at me, with both trembling arms outstretched, to entreat me in kindness to stop. . . . So I could not go on, but my success could not have been more complete. . . . At the very moment when they were crying out on every side that they would have it published at their common expense, I picked up my paper from the table where I had laid it and tore it into a hundred pieces, saying: "I promised I would, and I have." At first, my action was greeted with a cry of disapproval, but I believe that at bottom they were all pleased. Only I myself was sorry, because even now after all these years I believe that of all the pages I have blackened with my pen that was one of the least inferior." Anyone who has ever attended the sessions



of a college faculty will regret Fucini's discretion.

Three English girls in fiction have lately married Italians. These were not brilliant matches that would take them into that social class which is the same everywhere in Europe; the husbands were villagers, or even *contadini*. Lilia in "Where Angels Fear to Tread" did the best, for her handsome Gino took her to "Monteriano" in Tuscany, a composite town, one suspects, whose elements might be Volterra, San Gimignano, Montepulciano and Poggibonsi, names which do not invoke too dark a fate. "The Lost Girl" did the worst, and had to shiver the winter through among brutish peasants of the Alban Hills, in a hovel not so very far from Gissing's Ionian Sea. But all three had a like fate in this, that they stepped back a couple of centuries, out of a woman's world into a man's. Even in Monteriano, Lilia was never expected to go out of the house except to church; athletic Joanna, in "Open the Door," was forbidden to walk for as much as five minutes alone in the lanes about San Gervasio, and had to spend her days learning Florentine needlework from her fat sedentary sister-in-law; Alvina might not go alone to do her marketing even in remote, minute Pescocalascio. But Ciccio, her husband, lived most of his real life there. "She was beginning to realize something about him, how he had no sense of home and domestic life, as an Englishman has. Ciccio's home would never be his castle. His castle was the *piazza* of Pescocalascio. His home was nothing to him but a possession, and a hole to

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sleep in. He didn't *live* in it. He lived in the open air, and in the community. When the true Italian came out in him, his veriest home was the *piazza* of Pescocalascio, the little sort of marketplace where the roads met in the village, under the castle, and where the men stood in groups and talked, talked, talked."

This is the social level of Fucini's folk. Monteriano, typical as Gopher Prairie, may stand for any of his Tuscan towns; Ciccio, or his solider elder brother, for any of the small officials, shopkeepers and notaries who people them. The thought of Gopher Prairie tempts to comparison between Main Street in Tuscany and Main Street in Minnesota, and two of the three great differences between them have been noted already. One is the submergence of the women at Monteriano; not only can they not share the social life of the men, but they have none of their own, no clubs, no sewing-circles, no card-parties, no circulating libraries, no uplift work. The other is that it is the men who do the talking, who have anything to talk about, who have a monopoly of the culture. As for the third, what is wrong with Gopher Prairie is that it is blind and dead to beauty, it is eagerly progressive but does not know where to go; Monteriano is just the opposite, it is natural and traditional to it to accept æsthetic standards as important, it can even make a classical allusion or two when it pleases, but it does not understand "organization," it can never, never get things done. The position of woman Fucini took too much for granted to make any use of; woman in his stories keeps out of the way as she

keeps out of the *piazza* in life, save as Xantippe makes now and then a comic irruption. He gets his fun out of the municipal life of Monteriano; the personages of his small human comedy are civic pride, personal susceptibilities and official ineptitude, themes upon which he composes fantasies of delicious absurdity that evoke Max Beerbohm's "Mobled King."

There is never-to-be-forgotten Torrefosca, whose mayor and his subordinates, with their characteristic mixture of flowery pomposity, vanity, politeness and futility, we watch preparing for the visit of its prefect who never came. There is Pietrarsa, which could not tap its underground stream and build the fountain so much needed by the parched little hill-town, because the two opposite ends of it were agreed that it could in no wise be permitted to add to the conveniences of the fine folk at the centre. "Always everything for the *signori*! The fountain in the *piazza*, eh? because there live the mayor, and the three aldermen, and that hog of a Sor Girolamo! . . . The fountain there, the telegraph office there, the pharmacy there, and the lamp-posts all there in front of the grocery!" All the arrangements were finally made, and Renato, meeting the engineer who had them in charge, was told that work was to begin to-morrow morning. "Ah, my dear fellow, you don't know these hill-villages as I do. I am willing to bet you a heather-root pipe that a year from to-day you won't have laid the first brick." The other agreed, adding that it would be pure stealing, however, to accept the pipe. But the first brick is not laid yet.

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Best of all is the tale of the Monument. The town had decided it must have one. Signor Falsetti summed up its needs: "What! a wretched hamlet of scarcely twenty-five hundred inhabitants, a nest of beggars, a starveling borough like Nebbiano, must have its fine marble statue to a fellow-citizen, while we, three thousand and fifty-six souls of us, have not even a sandstone pillar to point out to an Englishman who visits our city?" Enthusiasm running high, it was decided to have an equestrian statue of heroic size, if possible of bronze; they soon had their first five-*lire* donation, fairs and subscription dances were arranged for, the citizens' band and the dramatic society promised benefit performances, and Signora Malvina consented to permit publication of her beautiful sonnet to the virtue of Lucretia. Then the chairman had an idea. Towards the close of a meeting, as the committee was about to adjourn, he threw all into confusion by asking whom they should erect the monument to. Someone finally recollected a canon, but it was felt that he would not look well on horseback. It was decided to leave this point in abeyance, and to get on with the statue. There began a vigorous correspondence with sculptors. Prices were unexpected. Bronze had to be resigned in favour of marble, marble in favour of sandstone. Then the Unknown Horseman had his steed struck from under him. Then there was nothing left of him but his bust. When the ultimate sculptor asked a thousand *lire* for a mere medallion, the distracted committee decided to use

the thirty-five *lire* it had actually collected to give itself a dinner at five *lire* per plate.

It is all splendid fun, bubbling up inexhaustibly from the true source of comedy, whose spring is at the very heart of human nature. Unlike the citizens of Pietrarsa, Fucini could tap this secret river whenever he wished. It never failed him. It would seem as if these stories, being in *lingua*, and on more general topics, might have a wider audience than the Pisan sonnets, in dialect, and confined to the idiosyncrasies of one city, but Neri's sonnets hold their own, even in the face of the steady popularity of the short stories; *All'aria aperta* has reached its fourteenth edition, *Le Veglie di Neri* its sixteenth, but in 1920 the *Poesie* had already attained their twenty-fifth. To insist so much on Fucini's wit and humour and so little upon his pity and pathos is to give an incomplete picture of his talents; but not an unfair one. Nothing is rarer in this world than native gaiety, and never has it been more to seek than in the Italian literature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. To dwell upon Fucini's is only to give relief to his deepest originality.

## AMALIA GUGLIELMINETTI

“SAPPHO BRINGS us back to Signorina Vivanti,” said Carducci in his review of *Lirica*; and in saying so, he said a great deal too much, though his words are still dear to her publishers. He mistook, perhaps, the blue flowers on a charming hat for the violet locks of the Lesbian. At any rate, to-day a younger critic, G. A. Borgese, the author of *Rubè*, is challenging us to the same lofty comparison on behalf of a younger poetess, Amalia Guglielminetti—possibly with less exaggeration.

What is there, in those shining fragments, that we may fairly ask of any later poetess whose work is to be mentioned in the same breath with them?

The moon is set;  
The silver Pleiades are gone;  
Half the long night is spent, and yet  
I lie alone.

Here are seriousness, sensuousness, simplicity, intensity, style; an astonishing directness, a piercing sweetness. The sweetness we shall not try to find; “I am as bitter as the winds of March,” says Amalia Guglielminetti, and truly. As for style, since we are considering a foreign poet, perhaps it is better to trust the critics of her own country, and Borgese, in likening her form, *italianissima e classicissima*, to that of D’Annunzio, sets hers high. He says she is “so classical” that he would



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have believed such precision of word and image impossible to a woman, and women cannot resent this faint praise, since it is true that no Italian poetess before her, save possibly Vittoria Colonna, has approached impeccability of form.

The directness Amalia Guglielminetti has, and simplicity of a kind. Not simplicity of style, and not of feeling, for with her both are highly intricate though sincere; but she has that simplicity which is directness, an entire willingness, that is, to be itself, a complete absence of posture. And sensuousness she has, both of the lover and of the artist.

The one whose eyes are wide to every gleam,  
Who understands all loveliness of words,  
Can live on what seduces her to dream.

For her, the "Seductions" include the soft-curved cheek of a Chinese vase, bright fruit pendent among leaves, gems and gold, perfumes—

Pure vegetative loveliness destroyed  
To deck the impure loveliness of Eve—

sunsets, velvet and foamy lace, and the glimpse of a ruined park through a grille:

The mute seduction of a garden-close  
Shut fast upon the shadows of dead things,  
For which shall never bloom another rose,

For whose dead dreams are no awakenings.

A beautiful morning of spring consoles her for the love-sorrow that wetted last night's pillow with tears. Her love of beauty gives her the only gleams of joy these

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poems betray. If she lack emotional intensity, it is partly made up for by her intellectual integrity.

Amalia Guglielminetti is the author of short stories, novels, and a play in verse. "Souls before the Looking-Glass" is the title of her most famous collection of short stories; they have a kind of brilliancy and made a sensation when they were new, but they are not, after all, so very different from many another volume of short stories in French and Italian. They ring the changes pretty frequently upon the lover who finds his mistress has another lover, or (still more frequently, since it is a woman writing) the lady who finds her lover has another lady. They are confined to the same level of society as the sketches in "I Have Only Myself to Blame," but have nothing like their wit, or their power of penetrating to the core of a situation, of showing in what manner it is just itself, and different. The soul we should most like Amalia Guglielminetti to display before the looking-glass is her own, and this she does in three volumes of verse—"The Foolish Virgins," "Seductions" and "Sleepless." As she goes on writing nowadays volume after volume of short stories, she grows trivial and begins to imitate herself; if we are to look upon her as a Sapphic portent, we must keep our eyes fixed upon these early poems. Her precocity was incredible; \* the first-named of these volumes was pub-

\* That is, if we are to trust Papini's dates in *Poeti d'oggi*; Russo (in *I Narratori*, I.C.S., with a question mark) makes her out two years older. Evidently in the Latin countries a lady's age is still a delicate matter.

lished when she was eighteen, the second when she was twenty-one, the last at twenty-four. When "Voices of Youth," her first book, appeared, she was only sixteen! Yet there is nowhere after that first volume a hint of immaturity.

At first sight it is easy to think we discern in the mirror a likeness to another woman's soul, that of a Frenchwoman, the Comtesse de Noailles. And there is a superficial resemblance between them, since both are interested in emotional experiment, and neither has the faintest moral preoccupation to give her pause. But if we look beneath the surface, we shall find a profound difference; the Comtesse de Noailles is content to live her emotions, Amalia Guglielminetti must investigate hers. Both are experimenters in the stuff of life, but the Comtesse de Noailles expects joy from experience, while Amalia Guglielminetti asks only understanding; the Frenchwoman seeks to feel, the Italian only to know. And the Comtesse de Noailles draws much upon books and places for her subjects; Amalia Guglielminetti never goes outside herself.

For the Comtesse de Noailles there is one certain good—

*Plaisir, le plus profond et triste mot du monde—* whose achievement is "the one act that defeats death," and death is its only enemy. The words *plaisir* and *volupté* dot every page, but in two volumes of Amalia Guglielminetti's poems, which are much concerned with the thing, the words occur but once, and then it is the *voluttà di dolore* of which she speaks. That is because

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Amalia Guglielminetti is not celebrating what they stand for; she thinks it infinitely important, she seeks to understand it, but for her it is no certain good; indeed, for her there is none. Scepticism and disillusion are her soul's proper wear; her intensities are intellectual and not of the emotions. Sensuality is an unescapable part of human life, therefore she will study it; and where can she find any sure data except in her own nature? So there she explores, interrogates and plunges, and like the diver, proud to have kept hold of anything in those dark uncharted waters, she comes up with hands clenched and eyes closed, to spread her prize upon the sands and look and decide whether it be a monstrosity or a pearl. This scientific indifference to the character of what she brings to the surface is new to feminine writing, and is having a great influence upon the women writers of Italy; they think perhaps, by imitating her unreserve, to find her power.

But if in point of power and style Amalia Guglielminetti comes not too badly off in the comparison forced upon her by Borgese's preface, in beauty of feeling she is greatly inferior. "I loved thee, Atthis, long ago"; against the haunting tenderness of that she has nothing to set but her egotism. Sappho was a lover, and so she had humility; Amalia Guglielminetti consoles herself for the failure or the lack of love, with her pride.

Me Nature moulded of inductile clay.

She never gives herself; as she says in the first poem of "Seductions," and in the last line of the last one, and

AMALIA GUGLIELMINETTI

many times between, she is "the one who walks alone." Borgese hears in this a note of pathos, but there is much more of pride.

Nay, I am harsh, I have a bitter laugh.

I'm readier to bite than to caress.

I would seem prouder than I am by half.

Yet what but pride should make her wish to seem so? Not bravado, though these lines quoted by themselves may seem to suggest it; from bravado, as from every other touch of pose, Amalia Guglielminetti is free. Posture she reserves, if we are to credit the literary journals, to *épater* her interviewers.

It is difficult to make a selection from her poems for translation. Any small group will omit many striking pieces. *L'Insonne* ("Sleepless") is the latest of her volumes of verse, *Seduzioni* the most original and celebrated, the one by which Borgese judged her. The poems of *L'Insonne* are nearly all love-poems, in the sense in which Amalia Guglielminetti understands love—a mixture of pride, perversity, intellect, excitement, and *l'uman bisogno che più rassomiglia alla fame*—and written in a difficult form adapted from the one Guido Gozzano devised for "On the Threshold." It does not lend itself to translation into English. Such stark and subtle confession from the depths of a tortuous spirit, sceptical, complex and analytic, in English needs the sonnet or some compact and quiet stanza-form like Donne's. Amphibrachs and double endings can hardly avoid the effect of wit, which is a dangerous

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friend to lyricism. They suit well enough Guido Gozzano's purpose, to set off his invalid's coquetry making light of his malady, but Amalia Guglielminetti's verses are too serious for it, and must not be made to jingle in a language in which double rhymes are scarce and conspicuous.

These examples are all chosen from *Seduzioni*, a series of seventy-six poems, composed in a novel form which she may have learned from Guido Gozzano, and which consists of thirteen lines of *terza rima*. They are preferred as the most personal; here she speaks throughout in the first person, whereas in the sonnet-sequence, *Vergini Folli*, she pretends to speak for her sisters—foolish virgins all, whether nuns or wives or schoolgirls—though these again are but imaginative projections of herself.

A man has followed her day after day in the street; she never speaks to him, but does not fear to express the response her instincts make:

. . . . .

He never guessed that his same burning pain  
Ravaged me too; I suffered even as he.  
In my dark soul I too was torn in vain,  
I too was dying of his malady,

## A DOUBLE GAME

While we are talking of some common thing,  
Little by little you come close to me,  
Bending dark brows above me, questioning.



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Strangers but yesterday, it seems, were we;  
To-morrow, parted, each to his own place;  
To-day, united by cold courtesy,

You bend above me, spying out my face,  
Attracted to me, but against your will,  
Saying vain things with flattery and grace;

Then sketch a gesture, trying out your skill.  
I answer with involuntary sneer,  
You draw back quickly. Enemies now. Still,

Our pleasant talk runs on, various, clear.

### PERPLEXITY

I wondered yesterday which I should do.  
Prudence and folly, each one had her say,  
I in perplexity betwixt the two. . . .

First eager curiosity smiled: "Learn!"  
Desire incited me with: "Nay, but try!"  
Then both of them my bitter pride must spurn;

The one who walks alone said: "No, not I!"

### A PRUDENCE

Let us cut short this ailment that has grown  
Almost to fever. It's not love, not yet.  
It was the play of circumstance alone

That caught us, not the labyrinthine net  
Of instincts and crude curiosities;  
There our incautious feet we have not set.

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But deep within each one of us two lies,  
Still dark and hid, that very different soul  
Which rude desire discovers and describes;

And love might now, unfolding that dark scroll,  
Unmask a weakling—were it you or I.  
So she who now eludes you softly stole

Aside and, out of prudence, says good-bye.

Here is one which betrays a rare touch of sentiment:

### WAITING

I wait you here. The old house is the same  
That knew my childhood, and that knew my eyes  
Beneath blond ringlets, innocent of blame.

The house knows you are coming, it is wise.  
It does not start and thrill (like me) and smile;  
I feel it harsh and hostile—it defies.

Not you, who hasten to me with the guile  
Of furtive loves, your lips athirst for mine,  
Not you the old house watched for this long while.

Here on its hill-side, overspread with vine,  
It watched to see come openly, by day,  
The Bridegroom who should claim me with a sign—

Then, heart to heart, to see us ride away.

But these matters, while important, are not too  
important:

THE CRISIS

. . . . .

Out of these crises comes my shaken heart,  
Bruised, crushed, as from the mill-stone comes the grain.  
Made new, amazed, it comes to with a start,

Listens, marks, tests—finds itself whole again!

## A NEAPOLITAN SONNETEER

THE TOURIST in a European city where he has no acquaintance, and whither he has gone, after the manner of most such visitors, unprovided with letters to establish him in social relations there, will people it for himself with literary associations. Every beautiful woman driving towards him down the Champs Élysées in a luxurious victoria is Mme. de Beauséant, every young elegant is Maxime de Trailles; any frowning Venetian *palazzo* may be hiding the swift decline of Milly Theale, any fair estate is Matcham.

And so, as he is being swept along in a steamer bound for Naples, past the strung-out necklace of sapphire islands, past Cape Misenum and Posilipo to where the city rises white and shell-shaped to the Castello, he will see that splendid panorama perhaps as the setting for the leisures and love-affairs of elegant foreigners like the English father and daughter and their French visitor in Gautier's *Jettatura*, or for the pretty but less richly appointed American romance of Aldrich's "Two Bites at a Cherry," or for the pathetic idyll of *Graziella*. But unless he knows the native literature well enough to have read at least Mathilde Serao's *Paese di Cuccagna*, he will perhaps not be thinking at all of the true Neapolitan life, that swarming, seething, passionate life

of Via di Toledo, of the *popolani* who breed and stifle in the insanitary *Funneco verde*, get themselves condemned to the prison of "San Francisco," claim sanctuary in Santa Maria del Rifugio, or amuse themselves in the theatre of *o Fondo*.

Yet this is the Naples of Salvatore di Giacomo, and it has sufficed him as subject for the successive volumes of a lifetime. From his first essays at short stories, recently assembled with an introduction by Benedetto Croce in a volume called *Novelle napoletane*, to the collection of verse, *Canzone e ariette nove*, published in 1916, he has never but once wandered farther afield than across the bay to Sorrento or around the point to Marechiaro, nor touched the social order at a higher level than some superannuated second-rate actress, or the *padrone* of a cheap *tintoria* or *osteria*. His one excursion beyond the confining circle of the Bay, a musical, poetical, studious sojourn at Ulm, produced a collection of German sketches not very characteristic or full of interest.

Usually even the lower bourgeoisie is above the skyline of his interest, which centres in the grotesque and tragic elements of Neapolitan low life. There are beggars and gamblers, hunchbacks and thieves, women of evil life, vagabonds who have come down in the world, butchers, puppet-showmen, swagger "non-coms" who turn the heads of foolish girls and then forsake them, jailers and jailbirds, and keepers of the secret lottery banks. These varied folk sing the famous street songs of Naples, and sometimes write them; they go to the

theatres of the marionettes; they listen to the recitations of fifteenth-century *cantastorie* who still narrate at the street corners the prowess of Orlando, and send their listeners home to lie awake with anxiety because the brave Rinaldo has fallen into the hands of the treacherous Maganzesi; they fall in and out of love, and when they grow suspicious of a sweetheart's fidelity punish her with the *rasoiata*, a razor-cut on the cheek that spoils her beauty and keeps her faithful.

The war supervened upon this swarming life, but except that they doubtless learned to hate the *Tedeschi* harder, it is not easy to believe that the Neapolitans of Via di Toledo had any concern with its causes and objects except to clamour for Fiume when they were flown with wine. What they cared about was to learn that Caruli's Peppe would never return, because he had been killed in action, or that Amalia's Tito had returned, but not to her.

An Italian observer recently in the United States, who found it equally astonishing to one of Latin blood that there should be schools of philanthropy and schools of journalism, remarked that in Italy, *si nasce giornalista come si nasce poeta*. Salvatore di Giacomo was born both, and the journalist, poking about the wharves and rookeries of lower Naples, studying the *mala vita* of the old maritime city, found the subjects which the poet has interpreted in both verse and prose.

Above all, in verse. Di Giacomo is a great lyric poet, and his Neapolitan songs are on the lips of every guitarist under the tourist's window at night, and the



*tarantella* is often danced to them at Sorrento. His are the loveliest songs composed each year for the Piedigrotta festival, every one a miracle of melody. Indeed, when Benedetto Croce brought the early short stories together in a volume in 1914, he did so avowedly to show the public that the well-known poet could write prose.

But he is also a striking dramatic poet, and for the versifying of that highly coloured Neapolitan life he has invented what is almost a new form, a kind of dramatic sonnet—a terse, jerky, nearly monosyllabic dialogue or monologue, fitted into fourteen lines of correctly rhyming hendecasyllabics, oftentimes with even a line or two of stage directions, and a list of *dramatis personæ*. The dialogue sonnet, indeed, is not new to Italian literature with Di Giacomo and Fucini. It was practised even in the fifteenth century, by the quick wit and ready pen of Antonio Cammelli (*Il Pistoia*), and a line which he addressed to himself might well be the device of Di Giacomo:

*Di tutto quel che vedi fai sonetti.*

But the latter carries his dialogue a step farther, forcing it to tell a story, and has compressed a hundred little episodes of humble life, violent, pitiful or shabby, into the most stately and traditional of lyric forms. To make the challenge sharper, they are, like every other line of his verse, in the Neapolitan dialect.

The question of the vitality and survival value of dialect is an interesting one. Even recognized lan-

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guages would seem somewhat threatened by the development of international ideals, and the Italian dialects, scattered over a land of no great extent, might appear doomed to blend and vanish with the advent of political union, conscription and compulsory education; yet they were never more flourishing, and seem to be declaring for a self-determination which endangers the prestige of Tuscan and the Manzonian vocabulary. Grazia Deledda and Giovanni Verga have accustomed us to the frequent appearance of Sardinian and Sicilian words and phrases in their pages, and for a classic example of single works composed wholly in dialect there are Goldoni's many comedies in Venetian; nearly all of Fucini's verses are in Pisan, and Pascarella is continuing the tradition of Belli's hundreds of dialogue sonnets in Roman.

The literary use of dialect is sharply questioned by some critics, but perhaps it may be dismissed as less a literary problem than a human. The authenticity of the impulse is the great thing, and the unself-consciousness of its use. If dialect feels most like his native language to the poet, and he is not merely attempting a learned "revival," then no doubt he will write in dialect best. Pirandello, who has published comedies composed entirely in Sicilian, writes on this question with great good sense:

The act of creation, the imaginative activity which the writer must furnish, whether he use dialect or language, is always the same. If it be the same, why, then, does the writer make use of the dialect, that is, of a means of com-

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munication necessarily more limited, instead of the language? . . . Either the poet is not in possession of the wider means of communication, that is, the language; or, having knowledge of it, he yet feels himself unable to wield it with that vivacity, that spontaneous intimacy which is the primary and indispensable condition of art; or else the nature of his sentiments and concepts is so rooted in the region of which he is making himself the interpreter that any form of expression other than dialect would seem to him unsuitable and incoherent; or the thing to be represented is so local that he could not find expression for it outside the limits of the thing itself. A dialect literature, in short, is designed to remain within the borders of the dialect. If it goes beyond them, it will be enjoyed only by those who are familiar with the given dialect, and with the peculiar usages, customs and life which the dialect expresses.

So we may suppose, as long as Scots is alive on Scottish tongues or in Scottish memories, that Burns is as sure of his place in English literature as Shakespeare, though he must put up with fewer readers. But Burns is an imperfect parallel to Salvatore di Giacomo, because a prime characteristic of these dramatic sonnets is their effect of contemporaneity. Kipling might be a better one, save that his verses are not sonnets; or the excellent and unforgotten "Love Sonnets of a Hoodlum" and "Sonnets of a Street-Car Conductor," which present the same impertinent contrast between stately form and slangy idiom, though in verses not dramatic but meditative. The result of Di Giacomo's experiment is most like, perhaps, a "Limehouse Nights" in sonnet sequence, but a "Limehouse Nights" lacking the sinister, unac-

countable element of the Chinese character, and warmed and lighted by the South Italian sunshine.

Neapolitan is rather harder than Venetian, though easier than Sicilian, but the reader who takes the trouble to learn it is richly rewarded by these striking sonnets. The poet has used the same "copy" that the journalist found for the short stories, and the latter make a useful background for these almost too elliptic verses. Many of the sonnets are grouped. A dozen or more describe the life of 'O *Funneco verde*, the unsavoury old tenement which has since been torn down to further the work of public sanitation. Here is a girl who has gone to the bad and broken her mother's heart, but comes home with gold and caresses and pretty frocks, and wins her affection again; there a mother and daughter are seated quietly sewing, when the police come to announce that their son and brother has been stabbed in the street below; an illicit secret lottery is broken up, and makes a grotesque *genre* picture full of humour; there is the scene of breathless excitement throughout the neighbourhood on the day of the public lottery; there are the grumbling midwife summoned in haste from her own affairs, the old woman money-lender who claims interest of three pennies upon a loan of four, and the sorceress who works with spells of hair and wax and portraits to win back faithless lovers. This last sonnet has these stage directions: "A basin with water on a table in the middle of the room. It is night. Giulia, the *signaturella*, muffled in a black shawl, is leaning near

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the bed of Marianna, who is stirring the water with a little stick. It is raining." Here is the sestet:

"What does it mean?" "If this wax melts away,  
Forget him; it would mean he was untrue."

"That girl! Madonna! . . . Not that girl—I pray!"

"Now let's see. If the wax is melted through—

Ah, my poor girl!" "It's—melted?" "Yes, but I——"

"The brute! Now show me how to make him die!"

A touching series of eight sonnets tells the story of Zi' Munacella, a nun who invokes an ancient church immunity on behalf of her lover at the cost of her own liberty for life, only to be told by the Mother Superior that the crime for which he was condemned had been committed for another woman. *'O Munasterio* pictures a poor sailor turning from an unfortunate love-affair to the religious life, without any vocation, and still longing for the beautiful world, for green things growing, and for his little fishing-boat at night with its lights fore and aft, and the waters of the bay with the moonlight on them. A group entitled "The Street" includes a sonnet upon the old-clothes dealer and his indifference to the pathetic and dramatic stories hidden in his wares; the brief tale of a girl who carries to her lover in prison in "San Francisco" an excellent meal of cheese and chicken, bought at a price he would not like to know of; and a violent bit of realism called "The Dead Man," where a woman, finding one lying at her door in the morning, mistakes him for drunk, and pours a bucket of cold water over him, crying: "For shame!

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In the morning, too! And right in front of the Church of San Severino!"

*Assunta* is the defence made before the judge by her lover who has killed her in a fit of jealousy. This one is not a sonnet, but rather more like a ballad, in rough, vigorous metre:

I said to her: "Listen, just listen to me,  
It's useless to talk to you,  
Yes, *infama*, I know it—but listen!  
Just listen. Don't laugh, Assù!"

Then of a sudden she said to me:  
"Let go of me! Let me be!  
It's no good, I am tired of you.  
Let go of me, Federi!"

And, turning, she threw a greeting  
To a man on the pavement-rim.  
And her eyes, how they sparkled at him!  
Oh, God! how she looked at him!

So, judge—have some pity on me—  
I lost my wits, judge, that's flat.  
"Have you no feelings in you?" I cried at her.  
"Are you just trash? Then—take that!"

An unforgettable sequence describes a tragedy taking place in the infamous old prison of "San Francisco," which gives its name to the series.

"You here? You, Don Giovanni?" "As you see,  
I've come to join your precious company."  
"For bloodshed?" "Humph, yes, blood. I lost my head.  
And you?" "I bluffed their warning, so they said."



The clock strikes nine, the other prisoners undress and prepare for bed, punctuating the wonted acts with profanities and obscenities; but the two old acquaintances agree to stay up and talk, as the jailer's friendliness—so the more experienced inmate promises—can be assured for a *lira*. The jailer enters:

"This is a friend of mine. He's just come in."

"Well?" "He's not sleepy." "Well, what's that to me?"

"If you'd let him—to keep awake's no sin."

"Not go to bed? He shan't stay up. Not he!"

"My friend, he's just got here. You know he's been——"

"What are you telling me? You let him be.

What does he think this is? A jail, or inn?

We make no fine distinctions here, you see."

"I have a *lira* here." "What's that you say?"

"I said I had a *lira*. What about

My handing you——?" "Come nearer, and speak lower.

In paper?" "No, sir, it's in *soldi*." "Eh,

Just hand them over softly. Wait! Look out!

My job is up if one goes on the floor."

Don Peppe thus appeased, the two men sit down together on the bench, and the new-comer, Don Giovanni, tells the other, Tore "'Nfamità," of his wife's infidelity:

"But, Don Giovà," said Tore, "Do you claim—

Your Ronna 'Ndriana? I don't see, you're so . . ."

"Do me the favour—not that woman's name,

Or call her by her right one. Which? You know.

I've killed her." "Don Giovà!" "Yes. For her shame."

"'Ndriana killed! But when?" "A week ago.

With some fine young *signor* she played her game.

I killed her as I'd kill a dog. One blow.

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But here! Why d'you draw off?" "I? Move away?

I don't." "Oh, yes, you've squeezed half off the bench."  
"I? Not at all." "Come nearer." "Aye . . . you say

You heard——?" "She fooled me for a year, the wench.  
You know who he was?" "Who . . . he was?" "Yes, who—  
That fine friend? Don't you know?" "No . . . who?"

"'Twas you!"

The seventh and last sonnet details the murder of  
" 'Nfamità" by Don Giovanni, who then calls in the  
jailer with ferocious satisfaction:

"Call in Don Peppe! . . . Here you see my friend.

He—loved me well. I've killed him. Tit for tat!

It cost me just a *lira*. Cheap at that!"

## ALFREDO PANZINI

THE TWENTIETH century has filled a want in Italian literature, it has given it a body of personal prose. There used to be for the English reader a kind of homesickness at the classic impersonality of Italian writing; there were no whimsical essays, no published letters that spoke a personal idiom like Cowper's or Stevenson's, Lamb's or Fitzgerald's or Hearn's, Jane Carlyle's or William James'. What Italian save Dante can we feel acquainted with, in his habit as he lived, as we do with these? There was nowhere any "divine chit-chat," nor yet any ruggedness and cragginess, the "smoky brightness" of Carlyle. Even lyric poetry, though it must be personal, is never idiosyncratic; only Dante among Italians ever had idiosyncrasy, which probably explains his unique popularity among the English. The French have heard the authentic personal tone ring from spirits so disparate as Mme. de Sévigné and Voltaire, and it has sounded its whole scale in the autobiography of Pierre Nozière. The land of Don Quixote has never lacked it. Only Italy with her immediate classical tradition, has realized so well the ideal of universality that in prose, at least, every voice except Manzoni's has sounded a good deal like every other.

But Manzoni had humour, and that has been a great rarity in Italian literature. Wit there was in plenty,

and satire and fantasy; there was eloquence and poetry and polish; but grandeur and resonance made every page too spacious, windy generalities blew from all four quarters, and there was nowhere a confidential corner of retreat. Humour lies close to idiosyncrasy, and what is universal will hardly be individual too; humour is digressive, discursive, garrulous, and a literature which is always underlaid with plan and idea, which is structural and formal as a terraced garden, cannot allow for such wild adventitious growths.

But to-day the English reader of Italian prose begins to feel at home. Papini and Ojetti, Annie Vivanti and Alfredo Panzini are providing the element he has always more or less missed, and doing it not without intention. Papini says in a preface of his that he hopes his short stories offer something of "humour in the English sense," and Panzini remarks in one of his: "It seems to me the hour has struck to substitute for the grand gala toilette of our prose a little simplicity, such as may reveal how we are really made, even though it be to the displeasure of the ladies. So do not hold it against me if in these tales you find . . . some trace of that philosophy called humour." And the word stands out boldly in its English spelling against the Italian page. As Italian literature begins to show this quality of English humour, it begins likewise to grow less universal; it becomes more "regional" every day, with centres and "schools" at Milan, Florence and Rome, and the note of quiet conversational intimacy begins to thread the wide orchestral strains of rhetoric.

The soundest material of the humorist is personal confession—"Myself, O reader, am the matter of my book"—and these writers tell us first and last almost as much about themselves and their condition as Sterne or Anatole France. Alfredo Panzini, we learn, was brought up in Romagna, that turbulent province which is oftenest paralysed by the general strike, where the proletariat is most given to calling names, among whose idealists the memory of Mazzini is most alive. He was born at Sinigaglia, where Cæsar Borgia murdered his guests, and the home of his youth, with his adored mother, was in Francesca's Rimini. He had his schooling at Venice, and later at the University of Bologna had Carducci for his teacher, and wrote a dissertation upon macaronic verse for his *laurea*. He is a professor himself now; after many years in a *Ginnasio* in Milan, a city he dislikes for its busy practical industrialism, he is at the Technology Institute of Rome; but when he used to mount his bicycle to take from Milan his homeward "Journey of a Poor Literary Man," and pass his vacation with his family, his road led back across the Apennines into Romagna again, to his village of "Bellaria." "Bellaria" is a settlement of fishermen on the Adriatic shore, near that cypressèd cemetery of San Mauro which was to Pascoli the "sad and only house of my kinsfolk," and not far from Cesena, where Renato Serra lived the scholar's buried life until the war summoned him to go and be slain upon the Isonzo front.

Most of Panzini's books seem to have been written in

the domestic solitude of Bellaria, and his old servant, his old mother, his little boy and girl and the memory of their dead brother, the freespoken fishwives striding past with baskets on their heads, the peasantry, and the grand folk of the neighbouring villa constitute the personages in the background of many. They are most of them reminiscent novels, half essays, which reveal his tastes and distastes one by one until we think to make out his quality as we have pieced together the personality of Anatole France out of *Pierre Nozière*, *M. Bergeret*, *Jérôme Coignard* and *Sylvestre Bonnard*. In the "Journey of a Poor Literary Man" and "Diogenes' Lantern," Panzini is himself; in "The World Is Round," he is thinly disguised as a professor and school-inspector named *Beatus Renatus*; in "The Devil in the Library," he is a bibliophile, chatting of old books and creeds outworn; in most of the stories and novels he is the humorous narrator, the observer of men and things; in "I Look for a Wife," he keeps quite out of sight, but we learn what he is not, or hopes he is not, from his ironic treatment of the industrialist, his autobiographic hero.

This last-named book has been translated into English, and it was a disappointment to those who relish Panzini's writings that when it was published in this country last year it failed to become popular. It is an amusing analysis, supposedly, of different kinds of women, but it is evident that fundamentally for Panzini there are only two kinds—those a man can fall in



love with, and the ones he can conceivably marry. "With the exception of *mamà*," says Lelio, one of the many nervous hypersensitive men of letters in his novels, "with the exception of *mamà*, all women are alike." These two kinds seem not to coincide: either Aspasia, stimulating and sterile, or else Xantippe, affectionate, bad-tempered, ignorant and energetic—whose name he has given, by the way, to one of his best books, an ironical study of Socrates from her point of view. After making an alphabetical list running through the letter "R" of the *signorinas* who would not do, Panzini's hero gives us the history of his two more serious love-affairs, one with a provincial Aspasia who it turns out does not wish to marry anybody, the other with a sweet young Xantippe in the bud, who elects a younger man. It is a truly humorous book, and we Americans say we love humour; why then, did it not succeed?

A recent study of Italian culture and the art of literature as practised in Italy, helps to find an answer to this question. Giuseppe Prezzolini in *La coltura italiana* takes pains to explain at some length why Italian literature is not popular in Italy, and two of his reasons would be still more cogent in America. The educated young Italian inherits a vast culture, the Latin in addition to, or continuous with, his own, which gives him a range of allusion alarming to the populace of uninitiated readers; and in Italy literature continues to be a craft, a mystery: "they recognize that it is one thing to have special knowledge and quite another to be able to write

a book." A book has to be a work of art, and *biblia a biblia*, valuable only for their subject-matter, are seldom written, or at any rate seldom published, so the reading public must be a public of connoisseurs. Moreover, in Italy, Prezzolini admits, they have not learned to respect woman; and while this fact would certainly not help to make a book unpopular in Italy, it would make a difference in America.

All these points are characteristic of Panzini; he is an erudite artist. Latin is like his mother tongue to him, Greek little less familiar, and his humorous page is freely sprinkled with quotations in both languages, which he sometimes deigns to translate but often does not; classic history and myth furnish his favourite similes; he is a stylist, in the lightest, apparently unconscious way, with that artlessness which is highest art, and requires an equal stylist for translator; his attitude towards women is the classical one, and in spite of his friendship for Sibilla Aleramo, the feminist and poet, it has never occurred to him to respect them. For Panzini, woman is either the ornament of man's life or its bane; she is nothing for herself; and his allusions to her in the general scheme of things are coloured by a light-hearted indelicacy of which only the Latin races have the secret. Beside it, that of Mr. Anderson and Mr. Joyce is solemn and heavy-handed, that of "Crome Yellow" and "The High Place," although as light, has more intention, while the laboured improprieties of "Salve" and "Ave" seem a matter of conscience. For Panzini this kind of thing is fun, simply, and bears no relation to the

eternal values. He is a devout reader of Plato and a hero-worshipper of Socrates, and in everything he writes is essentially a moralist. Though too sophisticated to be called unworldly, in more than one book he shows himself an enemy to worldliness and the "Golden Age of Mammon." As he wrote in a dedication to his mother: "You will find [in these stories] love and veneration for simple and generous things and disdain for every kind of profitable baseness, you will find conscience and truth preferred in them to fortune." These qualities have been present in Panzini's work from the beginning, but in the earliest books they went along with some pain and bitterness at the young author's discovery that the world does not make much account of them. As Maurice Muret said in 1920, of "Ingenuous Folk," published long before, when its author was just turned thirty; "M. Panzini was young when he wrote that, and the desertion of the Ship of Virtue filled him with indignation. *Il en prend son parti aujourd'hui.*"

Another reason for our reluctance to read him might be that Panzini is too Italian—a reason all to his honour. For while there is now a large body of American readers well steeped in French literature, ready to like an idea or an allusion all the better from the moment they can say of it "How French!" their emotions of recognition cannot be so easily stirred to exclaim "How Italian!" With Italy we have only the associations of the tourist, of the reader of John Addington Symonds, Mrs. Jameson and the Browning letters. The Englishman's Italy, the Italy of the past. The Italy of the

contemporary Italian is a closed book. We can hardly expect to catch an allusion to any Italian poet since Tasso, and the deep differences between city and city, province and province, escape us. We may know that the best Correggios are to be found at Parma, the finest Pinturicchios at Siena, but how are we to conjecture what the Vicentine instinctively expects of the Romagnol or the Genoese? But if *italianità* is still to become a part of our "apperceptive mass," Panzini is an excellent author in whom to study it. Many a careless allusion of his to some matter of course to Italians, suddenly shortens the frontier of our ignorance. What more enlightening to the foreigner, for instance, than his easy allusion in his *Diario sentimentale* of 1914-1915, to the ecclesiastical hostility to France? "I wish I could have all the wine," he noted on a day of August, 1914, when the headlines read: "Seven German Armies Invade France"—"I wish I could have all the wine the priests are drinking to celebrate to-day!" He did not like the French any too well himself until the war aroused his sympathies, and he does not like the Americans, nor the Germans, with their mechanized civilizations—nor the English, whose code as he understands it, "Bathe often and speak the truth!" leaves out the intelligence and the arts. With the habit of continual quotation, he never cites a foreign author. He is Italian of the Italians.

Last offence of all, perhaps, to the American public, Panzini is an intellectual and proud of it. Though a

professor, he is not apologetic. Again and again he serenely asserts the supremacy of brains, although well aware of what the practical world thinks of them. This conversation in "I'm the Proprietor!" (*Il padrone sono me!*), between an erudite landowner and his *contadino*, makes that clear enough:

"Tell me something, Mingòn," said the count; "do not great men exist for you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Those who study and write; like me, for example."

"You mean, who sit in an arm-chair and work with their heads?"

"And don't you think it is work, to work with one's head, even in an arm-chair?"

"It may be work, but I should like to sit in the arm-chair! I see that those who work with their hands envy those who work with their heads and sit in the arm-chair; up to now I have never seen any of those who work with their heads lay down their pens to take up the hoe or the mattock."

"It's not just, what you say, you know, Mingòn! If you only knew! But never mind. Tell me: are there any persons of whom you think: 'They are better than I?'"

"You mean, have an ability that I have not?"

"Yes, that's it, Mingòn! Now we understand each other—a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer?"

"It may be; but it's my idea that if I had been sent to school, I could have been a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer myself."

"Well, who then? Whom do you admire?"

"Oh, people that sing on the stage! Tenors!"

Mingòn was a Romagnol, and it was to a Romagnol

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that Panzini made the intellectualist's retort which he notes in his *Diario sentimentale* of the early months of the war:

Travelling is wretchedly uncomfortable. We are crammed together like anchovies, and our sufferings are further increased because the soldiers make us keep the windows closed. We travel in the dark. Is it the beginning of a new world?

Before we started, the station-master said to me with great satisfaction: "This is how things ought to be, things are going well! Ah, you *bourgeois* were accustomed to travelling with all the luxuries, your buttered rolls, your cold water and your hot water. *Wagon restaurant!* First class!"

"Listen, my dear fellow," I said, to make him keep still; "just read me one of your sonnets. How many have you written to-day?"

When M. Muret quoted "Ingenuous Folk" in 1920, it had been forgotten a quarter of a century. Like all Panzini's books, while the critics recommended its style, it remained unknown to the public. Only the true artist goes on writing in such a vacuum of oblivion and silence. The first to pump in the oxygen of a little popular praise and recognition was the truculent Papini, who knows so well how to admire beauty wherever he sees it; in his *Stroncature*, one of the papers which was not a "Slashing" expressed great enthusiasm for the "Journey of a Poor Literary Man," which had appeared in 1915 in the *Nuova Antologia*, and heartened its author to issue it in book form, with a grateful invocation to Papini, who he hoped might not repent of his approval. "I have never seen Alfredo Panzini face to face," wrote



Papini, "nor felt the warmth of his hand, but I cannot help loving him. To him, professor of literature, author of dictionaries and ornament of the publishing-house of Treves, the affection of an outlawed guerrilla like me can matter little. Critics and specialists in style . . . have explained to Italians why they should read, admire and appreciate Panzini, but no one, so far as I know, has said why we ought to love him. Really love, I mean, as if he were someone we know, and not a maker of books. Because Panzini is not only a great prose-writer and artist, who knows how to find, without seeming to look for them, all the elegances which an ironical grace can contribute to the ornamentation of a page or chapter, but also a splendid fellow, who reveals himself and commands your sympathy with printed words as others might with simple conversation at table or in the street. If Panzini were merely a writer he would be admirable, but above all, behind his writing, he is a man, and so he is also lovable."

The "Journey" came out in the first year of the war, an event which seems to have stimulated Panzini's ideas, since he has published a dozen books besides that one in the last eight years. His standards remain unchanged in a changing world, but, as M. Muret implied, he has grown indulgent. He expects nothing at all of human nature now; he is content to watch and philosophize, studying the phenomena of human conduct with the uncensorious eye of the poet, humorist and sceptic. He is not really at home in the world of after the war, it is *terra di esilio* to his generation, but nothing in it

escapes him, from the true cause of all wars and revolutions to the spiritual significance of the rectilinear modes in women's frocks. He expresses his ideas and makes his comments most happily in short tales and sketches; his mastery of irony displays them with deceptive ingenuousness in dialogues between personages who would often be scandalized to share them. He is quite aware, for example, of the new woman—"a new kind of *signorina* for a new world"—but she does not at all modify his views on women; he surveys her with undismayed amazement and amusement, and goes on being no better feminist than a Roman poet.

"Miss Edith," says the erudite *marchese* in *La Madonna di Mamà*, a duplicate of the erudite count in "I'm the Proprietor!"—"Miss Edith would like a position as English teacher in our schools."

"Well, she is certainly very learned," replies the young tutor. . . . "And I believe she is intelligent."

"Oh, a woman's intelligence."

"And what may that be?"

"A woman's intelligence. All profound learning has as its substratum the consciousness of death, and death cannot be fully understood by woman, because she is woman—that is, she is beauty and life. Can't you see Miss Edith behind the scenes, busily tying feathers and bells and bright ribbons on all the bitter poets and melancholy philosophers?"

As a professor, Panzini loves his profession and his students, and more than one of his stories, such as the *Cagna nera* and the *Madonna di Mamà*, has a poor young schoolmaster for its hero, who is mortified to find that an intimacy with Plato and Dante and Homer is no

passport to the fashionable drawing-room. It would seem that his students, like Papini, must love him. Before the war, he was holding private evening classes in Italian for young foreigners, and it was painful to him when international complications began to evidence themselves amongst his peaceable pupils.

A blond Saxon who had once promised to bring me a cuckoo clock from the Black Forest, announces that he, and his friend too, are volunteers. . . . They salute me tranquilly: "Goot tay, Professor."

I shivered. Eternal good night, perhaps, rather! Tomorrow a rifle will be put into the hands of these young Teutons, and they will go out to shoot a Frenchman, a Russian—why?

And yet during so many winters, in this school at the Philological Club of Milan, young Frenchmen, Russians, Germans, Englishmen, Turks even, have been treating each other with the most exquisite courtesy.

What a dark hour the cuckoo clock from the Black Forest is striking!

In the last year of the war, Beatus Renatus, in "The World is Round," meets in the train one of those former students who had gone to be a soldier, and we cannot help suspecting that the dialogue between them gives us a hint of Panzini the professor.

Suddenly the youth turned to Beatus with a sweet smile, and said: "Are you not Beatus Renatus?"

Beatus said: "But how is this? You know me?"

"I was a student at the University," replied the youth. "Don't you remember? Don't you remember, professor, that day in May, 1915, when we stopped you outside the doors

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of the University and begged you to speak? I was one of those, sir."

Beatus remembered that day well, and those days of May, 1915, when the University was closed and the students were in tumult. Up to that time he had lived in full possession of his own modest ideas, and now recognized that in those days he might have called himself happy. He believed then in personages who had benefited humanity. Their portraits and their volumes adorned his study. He saluted them mentally every morning, in exactly the same way that his parrot said: "Good morning, Beatus!"

He fancied that he also, in a small way, was a benefactor of humanity. His study was frequented by dear friends with whom he used to play many a chess-game of philosophy, measuring the stages of progress traversed by humanity: *Myth, religion, reason*. . . . They did not fail to discuss whether revolution is preferable to evolution . . . and there was discussion of liberty. . . . After which Beatus would serve tea to his friends.

But when the war came, all his modest good sense had curdled, like cream when it has just turned. It seemed to him that between his benefactors of humanity and children playing at hide-and-seek or blind-man's-buff, there was hardly any difference, and that he himself playing at philosophy with his friends was no wiser than the workmen playing at bowls outside the taverns. . . .

That day, that day in May, 1915, when the students had surrounded him, saying: "Beatus, we are going out to die. Speak to us, you at least, some word of faith, of ardent faith. We are going out to die, O Beatus!"

Had they gone mad, those boys? They were pale. They looked transfigured. Ah, that terrible day! The magnificent rector desired to speak to them, and began: "But, my boys, what has Germany ever done to you?" He had to stop and withdraw under fire of hisses. It was like a whirlwind.

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The professor of ancient history, hearing the shouts of "*Viva Trento e Trieste!*" had thrown up both hands and fled to the library to examine the sources of Diodorus Siculus. . . . The professor of Italian was terror-stricken. He said: "It is useless to struggle against Germany! Germany will win even if she loses. It is the materialistic conception of life that is winning. The spirit is dead, morality is dead, Christ is dead, the individual is dead! Perhaps in two or three thousand years man will be reborn, but that is how it is to-day, that is how it is fated to be. You speak, Beatus, you speak!"

But Beatus had not a word to say.

At the sight of those transfigured faces he had felt a kind of pallor at his heart, but the word of faith he could not utter.

At home again among his portraits of the benefactors of mankind, he perceived that they were impassive in their wisdom, like evil spirits. And he was ashamed of not being mad, like those youths. Their voices, saying to him: "We are going out to die, Beatus," suffocated him.

Adolescence asking for war; it seemed to him that that was what Italy herself was, an adolescent setting out unaware upon an enterprise foolish and sublime. . . .

The young officer, recalling those days to him, reminded Beatus of his modest good sense, lost for ever. He inquired for this student and that one, and the young man invariably responded: "*Morto!*"

So many dead! Beatus felt ashamed of being alive.

Panzini's most poetical work is "Diogenes' Lantern," published in 1909, in the days when the poet and humorist still had the better of the sceptic and ironist, and recounts his bicycle journey from Milan across the Apennines and the Lombard Plain homeward to Bel-

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laria. "Think!" he said to himself at the beginning of a later journey, "think! All the highways in the world belong to you. That is a great possession! They stretch out in their whiteness, night and day, and clasp the whole world round. You have only to walk on them." At the end of his journey there was waiting for him his rented cottage on the beach at Bellaria, and there came out to meet him "a boy and a cry of joy."

And the cry uttered that name which sounds sweeter to a man's heart than any other. And just as a faithful dog runs ahead of his master and behind him, so the boy did not know whether to give me my welcome or to run back and announce my arrival to his grandmother, waiting in the cottage, the cottage whose ground-floor window was just in sight, illuminated. We passed the fountain; it was letting its liquid pearls drop through the evening stillness into its stony conch-shell, melodious as a domestic song. I got off my bicycle, and the boy took the machine by its handles to guide it. . . .

One grey head, and two young ones, differently but equally beloved, started up at our approach. Hand touched hand, and lips, lips.

When it fell deep night, there came to my ears the respiration of the sea and the respiration of the children, asleep in the next room. The night was azure, broken here and there with golden splendours—the cabins of awakening fishermen. Stars stitched the skies with a confused embroidery, the sea reflected them with invisible motion, and there arose in my heart that illusion that reappears sometimes when one is weak from overstrain, or his brain is intoxicated with rapture, as mine was that morning at Lama Mocagno, when I watched the black pyramids of the mountains lifting themselves towards the star of Venus; perhaps it is a germ left in us from



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the primitive soul of the human race: "It is perhaps not improbable that God exists."

What is that voice that diffuses itself through the fields? It is the voice of the vile earthy toad, and it rings through the still air like a pure crystal bell.

## SIBILLA ALERAMO

“CAN ANYONE seriously suppose,” asks Giuseppe Prezzolini in his book on Italian culture, “that women know anything about themselves that men do not know? As if it were necessary only to feel, and not rather to understand, as if anybody could write better about women than Shakespeare and Tolstoi have written!”

But does this quite cover the case? It may be that men do know from experience and observation all that there is to be known “about women,” to use the words Prezzolini uses twice, but there remains to be expressed what women themselves know, what they think of themselves, of men and the universe, what their world is like from within—what they understand as well as what they feel, as Prezzolini puts it, evidently with the idea that they understand nothing at all. Prezzolini is thinking of woman only as object, the object of contemplation, feeling and understanding; so men have conceived of her always; but it is just possible that woman is also subject, and has her own *Weltanschauung*, if she look deeply enough within herself to find it. Such is the profound certainty of the Italian woman who calls herself Sibilla Aleramo, whose novel in which she first stated it, *Una Donna*, made a tremendous stir in Italy when it was published in 1906, and has since been

translated into French, English, German, Spanish, Swedish, Russian and Polish. Before Prezzolini asked his question, she had made reply.

She has something of the prophetess about her, and cannot have selected her sibylline pseudonym by chance, any more than the archangelic annunciatory Gabriel did his. D'Annunzio calls her, perhaps because of the inwardness and vagueness as well as beauty of her poetical prose, his "intent sister," but there is nothing vague about *Una Donna*; its narrative is crystal-clear, with an eighteenth-century directness and simplicity—as direct and simple as *Manon Lescaut*—and an artlessness increased by the fact that the writer never gives her characters a name. "My husband," "my son," "my sister-in-law," "the man my Swedish friend was engaged to," "the man my sister married"—something infantile in such nomenclature deepens the effect of sincerity. Localities, likewise, are not mentioned by name, except the South, the North, Rome and Milan. Unlike a famous Frenchman, the author of this book seems one for whom the external world does not exist.

Italian critics refer to *Una Donna* as an autobiographic novel and there are passages in Sibilla Aleramo's other books which are like later chapters in the same woman's story; but even though Panzini said that it "bears the seal of a life lived," and Arturo Graf thought it a book rebuilt out of a private journal, we are safer perhaps in saying, as she herself says of Colette Willy's *Vagabonde*: "Let us not be curious to know whether it be in part autobiographical." It is at

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least deeply and intensely felt, and the story of her unnamed heroine, is, if not her own story, her own tragic vision of woman as a captive and a prisoner in man's world. Victim of an act of violence which forced her into marriage before she was sixteen, the heroine's life of boyish freedom as her father's companion and copyist, a period of uncommon liberty for an Italian girl, came to a sudden end on her becoming a middle-class wife in a town of the backward South. Under the surveillance of the envious old maid who was her sister-in-law, estranged from her father, with her mother slowly losing her wits because of his neglect and infidelities, the property of a brutal husband her inferior in every way, her occupation gone, with no books to feed her strong and hungry intelligence, with no interests but her child and a little very dull society, she was stirred to a faint responsive vivacity by the only man in her circle who was capable of conversation; her husband's jealousy, which at first moved him to beat her, contented itself later with locking her in, day after day for months, alone with her little boy in a room that did not face the street, and there came at last out of her solitary meditations on a few books lent her by her physician, some articles on the life of women in the near-by rural districts. These opened the way to a position on a woman's journal in Rome, just when her husband lost his own position; and though by his orders she did all her work at home, she knew a time of financial independence and some contact with the literary world, until he was offered a better post in his former business and

they went back. Then a legacy which would have given her independence her husband would not permit her to receive; she had reason to think he was darkly wronging her and threatening her health and very life; she felt her mind sinking under strain and unspeakable tedium, and at last took the decision to leave her home forever. That involved leaving her child (like herself, her husband's property) to grow up without her sympathy, to deteriorate perhaps, to learn to hate her memory; but better even for him, she thought, a whole and healthy mother somewhere in the world, to whom he might one day be reunited, than a demented one like her own to cast a blight upon him from her madhouse. Like Nora, she went forth not to seek a lover but to find herself.

No one in the book sustained her; she was no worse off than other women, they said; submission and abnegation were woman's rôle in this world, and to ask anything for herself was monstrous; her sufficient reward for suffering and sacrifice, neglect and abuse, lay in the fact that the Italian man always thinks of his mother as a woman apart, different from all other women in the world, and this crown she must forfeit if she forsook her son. The poor heroine might have retorted that woman's abnegation and submission are very convenient for man and keep him comfortable and happy, that she has been less successful in persuading him that the essential manly virtues are the ones that would keep her so. But retort was not in her. She never retaliated, she was not even sure she was right or

that she did not deserve her neighbours' censure. She only knew the road she had to go.

Sibilla Aleramo wrote this book several years before she was thirty, out of the bitterness of her heart and because she could not help it; but it was a book "which had the value of an action," and no feminist pamphlet could be half so persuasive as this plain tale of an obscure woman's struggle for the right to be herself. If we look at all five of her books together, *Una Donna* appears like the first of three stages in a definite program which it is quite possible that Sibilla Aleramo traversed unaware, but which stand out plainly to the backward glance. First, the making of a feminist, the establishment of woman's right at whatever cost to her own individuality; next, the appeal to women five years later in the "Apologia for the Feminine Mind," to express that individuality, and no other, in the arts; lastly Sibilla Aleramo's own attempt to do this, in poems, essays and a play. This program bears little relation to feminism, the social movement, which Sibilla Aleramo deprecates as merely an adventure of woman's adolescence; what she is working for is the recognition of woman's peculiar energies, and their liberation from mere imitation of man's. The corner-stone of the "Apologia" is her persuasion of a profound spiritual difference between man and woman, the difference between intellect and intuition; if man exists by reason of thought, woman's essence is found in feeling—*amo, ergo sum*. This implies a profound diversity in their faculties of expression: a separate manner of feeling and



thinking must command its own separate idiom and style; but woman has never yet fully taken account of herself, of the differentiation of her species. "Because man preceded her by an instant—the world is young, few instants have been lived through as yet—woman has looked on, fascinated, believing he monopolized all the powers of expression, and every effort of hers has been an attempt at reproduction rather than at self-discovery." She will never exist as artist until she has taken possession of herself, and expresses in an authentic form her own spiritual quality. If she can learn to render her own world of the intuitions, her own more immediate contact with the universal, then there will arise a new and different classicism, a school and a tradition of feminine art, and with it a general increase of civilization. As it is, woman is but a wind-harp, stirred with every breath, and fills the air with echoes. What women's books lack is the feminine personality.

She flung her own challenge in 1913, in *La Pensiero*, a paper now to be found in *Andando e stando*:

All those qualities of clarity, order and logic, real and apparent, of dominated sensibility, of lucid fervour, which my brain has striven ever since my childhood to cultivate by hard drill and discipline, in order to meet the exigencies of those virile brains with which I desired to come to an understanding in the realm of thought, to-day I feel, as never before, to be heavy and ineffectual, clinging about me like weights, a hindrance in the assault which imagination alone would wish to direct. Yet I must once more constrain them to my purpose, so as to be heard. The men I talk to never imagine, when they announce with loyal astonishment that in

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talking to me they have a sense of speaking to an equal—they do not imagine how sadly that flattering declaration echoes in the depths of my mind, to what insoluble perplexity it recalls me. In order to win this necessary respect from my brothers, I have had to adapt my intelligence to theirs by the effort of decades, and the struggle to understand man, to learn his language, has divided me from myself. There are moments when I should like to cry: “I reason as you do, do I? I sustain your dialectic, I am strong, exact, disinterested, there is nothing about my mentality that irritates you as strange? Very well, now that I have proved my ability to follow you, let me tell you that it was only so as to have the right to ask the same of you. I am not in the least satisfied with this manner of expressing myself which I have arrived at, and which is congenial to you. In reality I am not expressing myself, not even translating myself; I am reflecting your representation of the world, accepted *a priori* and understood later by virtue of analysis, but I am not giving you the image of things as they are in me, intuition, poetry, a marvel as great when it is unlike yours as when it is like. I blur it even when I do not actually betray it. To draw it out, you would have to make the same effort of attention and abnegation for me that I have made for you. Shall we try it? This pleasure of agreement that we have enjoyed together is entirely the fruit of my willingness and goodwill. Now it is your turn.”

Women hitherto, according to Sibilla Aleramo, have been imitative in the arts because they were afraid to express their inner essence. Afraid of what? She does not explain, but her implication is that they lack self-confidence and feel secure only among the trodden ways. There may, however, be a deeper and more subtle reason, one of those things she says women have not

yet taken account of in themselves. It is possible that they are afraid of making themselves unlovable by plucking the heart out of their mystery, that they unconsciously try even in the arts to display that social self they have built up to match men's image of them, that they are afraid, obscurely, at the bottom of their hearts, of giving themselves away. Men may be of all sorts and conditions and women still be found to love them; but women must conform in some degree to the vision men have of woman, else they

do lie  
Poor girls, neglected,

and if they tell the whole truth they will shatter it. Men might learn in time to love the actuality as well as the conventionalized pattern they have made for themselves, but until lately women have not risked anything to find out whether they would. Like a woman engaged in an arduous and heating task, who knows a male caller is impending for whom she must on the instant be fresh and fragrant, curled and powdered, crisp and cool, authoresses have been concerned, however unconsciously, to remain presentable as women.

Among Italian women writers, Sibilla Aleramo seems to see the beginnings of what she is looking for in Annie Vivanti: "I imagine that Carducci must have glimpsed in the violent strophes of Annie Vivanti the possibility of a whole new feminine poetry quite different in form from the masculine." But Annie Vivanti, while being entirely and delightfully herself, yet departs not one

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moment from what man essentially wishes woman to be—a charmer. Even in her books, she is always the agreeable woman behind her tea-tray, with half a dozen men standing about with teacups in their hands, admiring her *mise* and her sallies. It costs Annie Vivanti nothing, and it costs women nothing, for her to be the kind of poetess she is. But what of Amalia Guglielminetti, what of the Comtesse de Noailles, what of Collette? Their attempt at a direct translation of their being in terms of physical sensation, their exaltation of a sensuality at once refined and crude, does not fit into the conventional pattern anywhere. If women repudiate it, then they are continuing to discourage a sincere and personal feminine art; accept it they will not. What these women write, while it may be true for some, is certainly not true for all, but that is a principle women unconsciously deny; they seem to feel that one woman's literary confessions somehow involve the whole sex. Men feel under no obligation to explain that they are not all of them Rousseaus or Augustines or Casanovas, but if a woman admits in print something unusual or undesirable about herself, women act as if she had exposed them all.

But there are to be heard other authentic tones; here and there an authoress begins to express her unvarnished views of men and women, and man's immemorial sneer at the "lady novelist" must begin to stick in his throat, as he finds in "Vera's" husband, in "Mr. Waddington," in the brother-in-law of "Miss Lulu Bett," portraits of himself which he could hardly have painted. Only a

woman could suffer from the odious excellences of those good men and loving husbands, though "The Egoist" keeps us from supposing that no man could see them. Perhaps it is in their exposure of women, however, that women have been most original; it is to them we owe the ironic treatment of those members of their sex whose fascinations blind men to everything else about them. A man describing such a heroine, even when he sees through her, as Barrie sees through his, as Milne sees through "Belinda," is always a little in love with her. Man can admit the moral turpitude of Armida, Alcina or Duessa, he can see beauty as possibly wicked, but never as insupportable. It took a woman to expose those intolerable enchantresses, the heroine of "Enter, Madame!" "Tante," and Leonora in "The Back Seat"; or those women whose goodness and beauty drape a priggish egoist, like Imogen in "A Fountain Sealed" and the daughter of "A Mother in India"; or E. M. Delafield's heroines and Miss Hartill in "Regiment of Women," who belong in no general category, but whose peculiarly feminine vices a man would never see, since they are all "good women" of the sort that move only in woman's world, harming only women. In life, a woman dare not point out the weaknesses of the attractive, for fear of the feline appellation: from women, because she is a traitor to the secrets of the guild; from men, because they would sooner believe her bitten with envy than admit a flaw in the ideal charmer, because they hate being made to see the wheels of the beautiful and mystifying mechanism go round. And



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in literature, until very lately, the authoress has observed the precautions of the woman. But now Anna Wickham has told another secret in "The Contemplative Quarry," and the lid, if not quite off, is beginning to heave and quiver and rattle with the heat and agitation of the waters under it.

Still, all these promises of originality are fragmentary. For the feminine art that Sibilla Aleramo prophesies, there is need of long and deep meditation. It is a whole philosophy, a personal interpretation of life that she awaits from women, not mere imitative Nietzscheism, Bergsonism, materialism, mysticism, what not, and she is feeling her way towards one of her own. The keys for her are love, liberty and poetry—love in its widest sense, of which Dostoevsky is her exemplar, and liberty in Ibsen's sense, the liberty (and duty) to be oneself. The poetry is her own, the atmosphere of her soul, which pervades everything she writes, though it is least moving in her one book of verse, *Momenti*, a collection of lyrics in free forms. Her second novel, *Il Passaggio*, is pure poetry, autobiographic in form, "expressionistic," not easy to understand, but full of a rather mystical beauty. Her play, *Endimione*, which was performed in Paris in 1922, is a poetical myth of the transfiguring power of love, a work of sentiment rather than dramatic power, delicate and artistic. The most successful attempt of her art to transfer her meditated intuitions to the printed page, is the volume of essays called, in St. Francis' words, *Andando e stando*. To be rendered, perhaps, "Passing and Pausing." They present a personal



and feminine point of view on impersonal subjects. Some are on books, some on ideas, some on the war—one of these, called “Brother Iron,” pictures Assisi in war-time, with the village blacksmith forging shells, and three convents turned into barracks—and many are beautiful descriptions of places: the external world has begun to exist for the author of *Una Donna*. Some paragraphs from the paper on Capri will give an impression of her style and temper:

I was there in March, 1918, on the occasion of the first nocturnal air-raid over Naples. The next morning, Donna Lucia Morgano, in her little café which has seen many artists and snobs, and an emperor or two, in the last forty years, had an anguished look on her large tranquil countenance, and what she said to me was: “You see, *Signora mia cara*, the population is a bit upset. We are not accustomed to grief.” Magnificent words! If it be true that the most important thing of all is to be oneself, how much pride there must have been in that affirmation by the island in that tragic hour, through the lips of a simple woman, of its own true joyous essence! Capri was not created for suffering!

The idea which, time out of mind, foreigners have had of Italy, as a land spontaneously glad, does not hold for the peninsula, as we Italians of all regions know very well, but it is true of certain of those small gardens which front the middle of the Tyrrhene Sea, and true, above all, of Capri. Whoever goes there as a visitor receives the impression that the natives, in showing him hospitality, are doing him an extravagant favour, they, the children of the sun, absolute rulers of their republic, lords and proprietors of a fairy-tale domain.

It must have been magical, arriving at Capri in the boat from Naples half a century ago, after a sail that took the whole day long, finding at the wharf a little beast of burden

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ready to carry the luggage, ascending on foot among the vineyards and orange-groves in the falling light, with the first stars quivering against the rocky cusps on high. Above in the village there was a single small cosy inn, and it is told of some that, coming to stay a week or at most a season, they kept delaying and delaying until they had lived their lives out there.

Now there is a regular boat service. But whether because of the war and its aftermaths, or by a mysterious natural grace emanating from that divine shore, true it is that the crossing is still slow, slow and full of dreams. At a certain hour, near sunset, the distance between the Parthenopean shore and the bulk of Capri seems to become irreducible, in a suspension of enchantment. The sun sinks into the sea, lovely violet tints overspread the bay, and the ancient spirit of the Greek sailor, loosed from all his pains, breathes sweetly over the deck.

It will be a long while before anyone will see the island again as I saw it in that month of March. Large and small hotels alike closed and deserted; no foreigners in the five or six streets of the village, nor along the three or four hundred rocky climbing paths; wild grasses and weeds growing between the cobble-stones of the steep and tortuous Via Krupp, perpendicular among the rocks, just as they do along that more gently sloping road which leads up through the olives to the Roman ruins by Tiberius' Leap. The exhalation of their sharp scent seemed almost to utter an awareness that this was their last time of liberty. Even the line of rock against the sky seemed to know that this renewed and perfect solitude was again to have a term.

The shape of the island is such that its members seem to stretch and lift with muscular contractions, like those of a beautiful lioness. Infinite is the variety of her aspects, of her harsh material and her compact mass; the tints and shadows

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take on incredible depths and intensities. Couched between two gulfs, she carries on her mane the white houses of Capri and on her high curved croup the white houses of Anacapri. White balconies, white porticoes. . . .

If the island has a soul of its own, it probably considers the inhabitants as creatures of the smallest importance, about equal to that of the peach-blossoms which in the springtime set a note of rose-colour among the grey and gold of the rocks. A soul drenched and dazzled with light. Its children grow old, like its vineyards, equally unable to alter the island's serene indifference to everything that is not the sea and azure air which bathe it round.

The artistic performance of Sibilla Aleramo during the next ten years will be an interesting spectacle. Though neither the first nor the best of women writers, she is the first to propose a literary program, certainly a literary program for women. There were at least two kinds of women writers, of good ones, already in the field when Sibilla Aleramo launched hers; those who hoped their work might be mistaken for the work of men, and called themselves by a masculine name—preferably George—to that end, and those who were not concerned to present themselves as either masculine or feminine, artists who chanced to be women. To the newest class, of those who consciously use their feminine quality as material for art, belong most of the women poets writing in English to-day, but they would not quite meet Sibilla Aleramo's hopes, since it is not merely their art but their subject-matter which is personal. It is not merely the "answering voice" of the lover, it is a feminine view of

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life and the universe that she asks for—a thing we have hardly had in English, unless it be in the essays of Mrs. Meynell—and we shall only know exactly what she means women to do in literature once she has triumphantly and unmistakably done it herself.

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WHAT ENGLAND lost in Rupert Brooke, Italy lost in Renato Serra—a young man of thirty-one with an intense yet unblinded love of country, an artist whose accomplishments promised beautiful things to come, whose death brought him “the love of many who did not know him and redoubled the love of those who did”—and it is not fitting that his young bones should welter to the parching winds of Mount Podgara without some meed of foreign tears. Rupert Brooke was a poet, Renato Serra a poetically minded student of life and letters who wrote in prose, and each had a touching grace of person that made his elders think of him with wistful affection; so Henry James wrote of Rupert Brooke, so Panzini and Papini write of Renato Serra, and what these and others say of him will give him a greener memory abroad than his own writings can.

Papini saw him but once. In one of the *Stronature*, he sets himself to evoke that “concrete, substantial being, seen for the first time one noontide, enjoyed through a single afternoon and never seen again, yet so stamped upon my memory that death itself can only jealously intensify the image.” Writing shortly after Serra’s death, he said:

I leave to others the task of carefully motivated judgments

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and commentators' divinations, because I was not granted—while he was still smiling his smile on this earth—that of him which belonged to me. From now on there remain to us only his two names and some thousands of words. The names we can cry out or carve in stone; the words, reread and understand. But of that no longer living man every living element was good, and he and I did not mingle in this life, intimately, as we could have wished. Now, to-day, his entire self comes back to me in sorrowful recollection—as it will until another death. . . . The tall frame, its build, its flesh, above all that handsome face of his, and those eyes, water-clear, in which were set two rounds cut from the March skies of his own Romagna. The Lungarno sunshine was falling on him. It was April, as in the story-books. We walked along with equal pace, then stopped at the entrance to the Uffizi to look at the statue of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, in dusty Carrara marble. Then we talked of Rimbaud. We walked, looking at nothing, seeing everything. Renato's soft voice, uncertain like his gait, touched on everything, trying out the thought of his new-found friend. . . . We went to hear some music together . . . and returned together. . . . It would have been agreeable to go further in company, now that we had found each other, but in one of the piazzas, under the pale light of a white glass sphere, we took leave of each other. He clasped my hand firmly—neither of us guessed, for the last time. If I had only known that I was never to see him again, that he was never to return! If I had only known!

Alfredo Panzini, on the contrary, knew Renato Serra well. They were both Romagnols, though Serra's Piedmontese mother mingled in him the cold tenacity of Cavour's northern kingdom with the romantic fire and turbulence of democratic Romagna. Both took their



degrees in literature from the University of Bologna, under the direction of Carducci. Carducci left his deep impress upon Serra's spirit, and imbued him with his two ideals of Art and Italy—classicism and the lofty vigour of the *Risorgimento*; yet Serra's catholic mind could make room, as his master's never could have done, for admiration also of the æstheticism of Croce. After leaving Bologna, in 1904, Serra spent two more years of study at Florence, where he was drawn into the literary movement directed by Papini and Prezzolini, and during the last ten years of his life frequently contributed to *La Voce*, the belligerent organ of their propaganda against the antiquated and the dull, those critical studies of his compatriots and contemporaries which he later gathered into books. As soon as he had finished his military service at Rome, in 1907, Serra secured the post of librarian in the Biblioteca Malatestiana at Cesena, the town where he was born, and settled down there to the hermit life of scholar and writer, remote from groups and schools and all literary fads and follies, which suited his straight and simple nature. "As happy there," so he explained to a mystified friend, "as a king *incognito*! Literary and philosophic thought in Romagna has no great value or importance, so one can enjoy there all the advantages of anonymity." Cesena is not far from "Bellaria," the fishing-village on the Adriatic shore where Alfredo Panzini repaired for his vacations with his mother and his children; and Renato Serra more and more frequently made his way over, on his bicycle or even on foot, seeking congenial inter-

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change of thought with the elder man of letters. In 1916, the year after Renato Serra fell in battle, Panzini dedicated a book to him, *La Madonna di Mamà*, a war-time novel:

We met in person for the first time at Bellaria. "And who are you?" I asked. I was lying stretched out in the shadow of that ill-fated house of mine, when, startled by steps on the grass, I asked: "Who are you?" "I am Renato Serra." Then I looked at you. Straight, luminous, pure; sandals on your feet, like a pilgrim. Never did a summer morning, the quiet sea, and the loud song of the cicadas seem to make a setting for a nobler young creature. And you were smiling at me, Renato, with an indescribable smile that was a mixture of irony and timidity. And I remember that in the frequent colloquies we had later, along that sea-beach, I reproached you with consuming your youth in your obscure city of Cesena, and you only smiled.— Now, I am thinking over those colloquies and those words of yours; they were certainly singular for a young man to have uttered, but still more singular in themselves, because of their atmosphere of marvellous elevation.

And besides your words, I have also in my memory your strong shape and your gait as you walked along the margin of the sea, where the blue waves were coming up humbly to break upon the sands, as if they would gladly embroider your road before you. "Why in such haste, Renato? Why not stretch ourselves indolently upon these sands?" Ah, you did well to hasten away upon your bare feet, Renato Serra! You did well to make your way so rapidly out of your obscure city, throwing off all worldly impedimenta. You were on your way towards immobile, unchangeless truth, you were on your road to death!

These colloquies were most frequent during the

time of Italy's neutrality, what Papini calls the nine months of incubation, and the tormented thoughts which were maturing into the "Examination of Conscience of a Man of Letters" Serra expressed and reworked in many a discussion on the beach at Bellaria. Serra's name recurs constantly in Panzini's journal of those months, his *Diario sentimentale* of July, 1914, to May, 1915. In the last days of July, local uprisings and disturbances in Italy looked more important than events in Serbia or Prussia:

There could be felt a sense of fear on the part of the governing classes. And playing on that fear, thundered the voice of Professor Benito Mussolini, director of *Avanti!* the socialist paper, in no wise intimidated, in no wise repentant: "But this is the class war! One does not make war with gloves on; these mobs represent the *Sansculottes* of the new revolution. Let the *signori borghesi* look to themselves!"

I was chatting of these matters in the month of July, when the curtain had not yet risen upon the European tragedy, with my friend Renato Serra, here in Bellaria, on the sea-shore. Renato—and let not my friend be vexed, restive as he is under any praise—is one of the most luminous intelligences I have had the good fortune to encounter in these later years; and if things were as they ought to be, his position would be in some quite different place from a deserted library in Romagna. He is to-day in the full splendour of his youth; tall, clean-shaven, with quick and ready muscles (not at all like mine), he still presents at first sight the impression of a tall boy, respectful and almost timid. But when the sword of his thought flashes out, it is the listener who becomes timid and respectful. Not that he is a dazzling speaker or a dialectician. He is persuasive because he is profound, generous of concessions, human. He speaks

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softly, with marked Romagnol accent, half closing his eyes as if to concentrate better upon his inward image; often with an imperceptible smile! It is a pleasure to listen to him, and admit that he is right. In his city in Romagna they call him Renato. He loves to live among the *popolo*, but does not drink their strong wine, because he is a water-drinker. He adores his Romagna with a home-loving affection, although its people little suspect what Renato is.

He often used to come over and take me by surprise, flashing along on his well-polished bicycle, with that wise, affectionate smile of his, under the noonday sun. We were so remote from the war that we could psychologize about the events of June, especially here in Romagna. One class had then been called to arms, and it looked as if a new railway strike were imminent. "Mussolini," remarked Serra, "is a Romagnol of pure revolutionary temperament, a sincere one. He may be offending secretly even some of his own party, but he has the great merit of having dissipated the equivocations with which we were lulling ourselves. There really exists now in Italy a revolutionary state of mind."

To Renato, perhaps because of his youth, this was not displeasing. To me, all that distracting confusion was, above all, a bore. We were so comfortable just as we were, there by the sea!

Later, after the war was well started, near the end of August, Panzini noted in his journal:

Renato Serra comes very often these days, and every time he leaves it is with an "*Arrivederci!*" ever more uncertain. As a reserve officer, he may expect his summons any day. Like me, he no longer has any inclination to do anything. "One lives in a new atmosphere," he says; "the usual subjects, the usual occupations no longer seem to have any point."

I had passed the whole morning with my back bared to

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the sun, perspiring at the enormous task, undertaken for the sake of doing something, of sifting all the gravel from the garden walks. "One wishes in these days," Serra went on, "to talk only with those two or three persons one can talk to without words. That is why I come to you." "Thank you!" said I. We walked along the beach, he reciting one of Petrarch's sestinas. It is funny to hear him, athletic disc-thrower that he seems, modulating lines of poetry in a manner all his own, his voice rising and falling, plaintive as the amorous nightingale.

The months wore away, and Serra was called to the colours. The fated month of May came in, and Renato sent his picture to Panzini in a letter from his station on the border.

What a sad letter, full of the presentiment of death! "I have never given a picture of myself to man or woman that I can remember. Even now I feel a little embarrassed, almost ridiculous, to be sending it to anybody. But I am not doing it out of tenderness for myself."

I looked long at his strong beardless profile, so silent. It was like a seal! I sat a long while looking at it. And then came the thought of death, which seals all.

Another image meanwhile had come to mind and kept making itself concrete, but I put it from me. Devoutly I laid away that post-card with the profile of Renato. Yet that other image kept impressing itself upon my mind, another profile, beardless and strong. Finally I yielded and rose to my feet. Where had I put it? I searched for it and found it, my post-card portrait of the gigantic German, my erstwhile pupil of the Philological, the one who was to send me the cuckoo clock.\* A strange, malign power forced me

\* See p. 193.

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to lay the two portraits away, face to face. Equals! Was it a profanation? They are both men.

A day or two after Italy declared war, Renato Serra was reported injured.

I had just returned home, when bad news came. A post-card from Latisana tells me that Lieutenant Renato Serra was injured in an automobile accident, and has suffered a fracture of the skull. Has this war also to begin with the sacrifice of a creature gifted and well-born as Iphigenia?

But next day came a reassuring telegram from Serra himself: "Everything going well. I shall be there in time after all. Renato." The Press of Turin had given him out for dead, and Panzini was besieged for news by eager friends at Milan. He thought of Cesena, the small provincial city where Renato was loved but unrecognized, and felt that he ought to contradict the bad news there.

Dear little Cesena of my Romagna, you ought to be told of this! In this huge city of Milan, you seem of no great account. But Renato Serra is from Cesena, and behold, Cesena takes on a great importance. It may even pass now for an intellectual centre. When we name Chios, Samos, Ceos, we fancy ourselves to be naming cities full of wisdom and poetry, whereas who knows how rude and savage they may have been? It is Simonides, Pythagoras and Homer who give those towns their splendour.

"The Examination of Conscience of a Man of Letters," which Serra was helped to make by the wordless companionship of Panzini on the sands at Bellaria, he



wrote during five days near the end of March, 1915; he was called to the colours in May, and Italy declared war; in July, leading his company in one of the early attempts against Gorizia, he was killed. He had come to wish that Italy would enter the war against Germany, and coveted a place on her front, but he never deluded himself into hoping anything from it. He had arrived at a prophetic certainty, which is the message of the "Examination of Conscience," that war changes nothing and that this war would change nothing.

Always the one refrain. War can change nothing. It does not better, nor redeem, nor wipe out; it is for itself alone. It works no miracles, it pays no debts, it washes away no sins. Not in this world, which no longer understands the meaning of grace. . . . Wars have come, devastating and horrifying, and millions of men have not even noticed it. Individuals have fallen, have fled; but life remains, irreducible in its primordial animal instincts, for which the alternations of the sun and the seasons are more important in the end than all the wars—mere fleeting rumours, dull, heavy blows which become mingled and confused with all the other fatal travail and dolour of life.

After a hundred years, after a thousand years, when war returns, it breaks against the same dikes, it sweeps down to the same river-mouths groups of men uprooted and driven from the same seats and cities. The same human tide that has overflowed the Rhine and spread over Flanders, watered the Sarmatic plains and broke against far mountain passes. They are fighting in the same fields, they are marching along the same roads. . . . And in the end everything goes back more or less to its old place again. The war will have liquidated an existent situation, it will not have created a new

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one. . . . History will not end with this war, it will not even be essentially modified by it. Neither for the victors nor the vanquished. Perhaps not even for Italy.

Let us suppose for a moment that the oppressors have been defeated and the oppressed avenged; that the final issue of the conflict is all justice, and the greatest good possible on this earth. But there is no good that can pay for tears wept in vain, for the lament of the wounded man left to die alone, for the pain of the sufferer that no one will ever have news of, for all the blood and human torture that was not to any purpose. The good of the others, of those who survive, does not make up for evil left without remedy to all eternity.

Perhaps the benefit from war, as from all other things, lies in itself: the sacrifice one makes, the duty accomplished. Nations and individuals learn to suffer, to resist, to be content with little, to live more worthily, with a more serious sense of brotherhood, a more religious simplicity. Until they unlearn it again. . . .

After all, there is a dead loss, grief, ruin, havoc, and enormous, useless destruction. . . . The world is full of evils without compensation. That is its law.

Sad words to have been written in March, 1915, by one who was to fall with an Austrian bullet in his breast in July! We who, surviving, read them must feel like the sorrowful old professor in his friend Panzini's book—ashamed of being alive. And yet, as Prezzolini says: "Serra dominates us all now, partly because he has passed through and beyond all miseries and has left behind him only sorrow, sympathy and admiration. His death has really something pagan about it. He seems

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to have undergone an 'Assumption' to Olympus, such as used to befall those men who were great like the gods but had the misfortune to be only mortal; such men the ancients were wont to assign to the skies, among the heroes."

THE END



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